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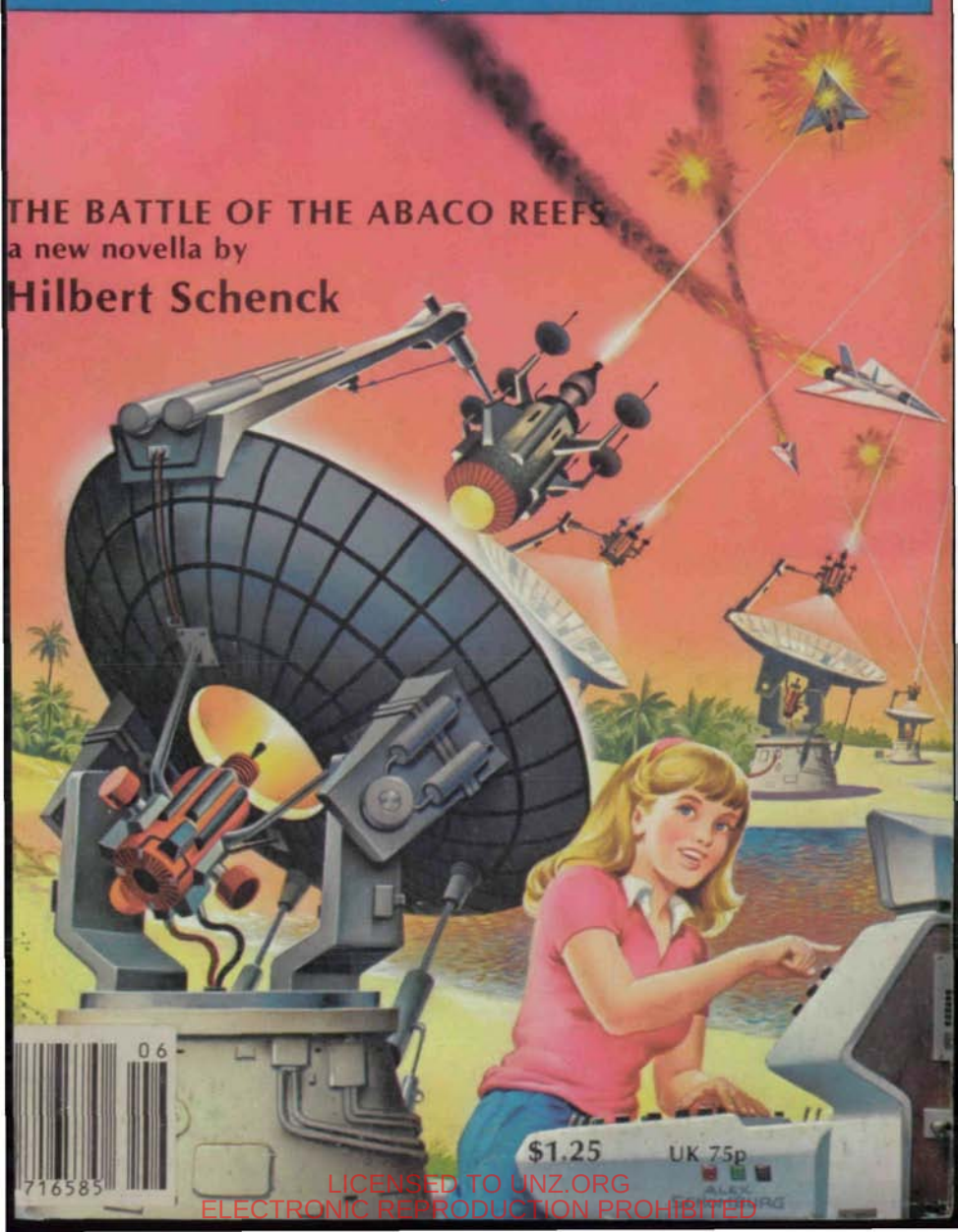
JUNE

THE BATTLE OF THE ABACO REEFS
a new novella by
Hilbert Schenck



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COVER BY **Alex Schomburg for "The Battle of the Abaco Reefs"**

EDWARD L. FERMAN, Editor & Publisher — ISAAC ASIMOV, Science Columnist
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The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction (ISSN: 0024-984X), Volume 56, No. 6, Whole No. 337; June 1979. Published monthly by Mercury Press, Inc. at $1.25 per copy. Annual subscription $12.50; $14.50 outside of the U.S. Postmaster: send form 3579 to Fantasy and Science Fiction, Box 56, Cornwall, Conn. 06753. Publication office, Box 56, Cornwall, Conn. 06753. Second class postage paid at Cornwall, Conn. 06753 and at additional mailing offices. Printed in U.S.A.

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SURVIVOR

OCTAVIA E. BUTLER

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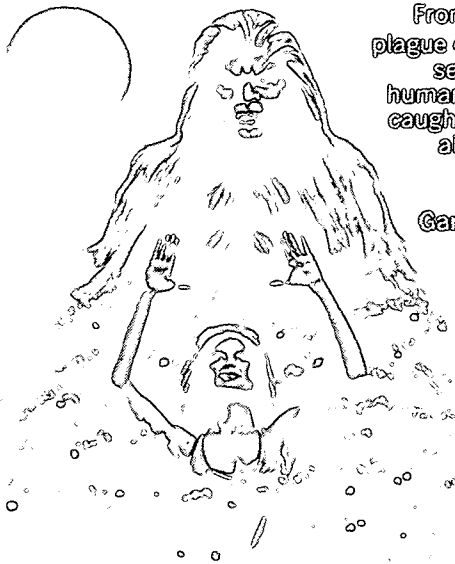

From an Earth ravaged by plague came the Missionaries, seeking a new home for humanity. Instead they were caught between two warring alien cultures, and only Alanna could see the enslaving lie the Garkohn "friend" offered —or how the Tehkohn "foe" could offer hope...

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The of the

The fall wind blew steadily from the east, dead across Elbow Cay, and the big, vertical-axis wind machines, running synchronously in the steady breeze, gentled the island with their hushahushahusha, a giant snoozing in the lowest frequencies. Susan Peabody toyed with her coffee and half watched the tiny, jewel-like TV screen at her elbow, thinking of nothing in particular. Or, really, much in particular such as the department, and the university, and the screwing, literal and figurative, she had taken from that bastard... But that was already six months past, and how big a plumb would it have been anyway, in a riotous, unheated Boston?.... Susan, a forty-year-old, tall, thin woman, her brown hair cut short and severe, her thin lips pressed thinner still, thought to herself, hating herself as she thought it: I have a good face, high color, a straight nose and a strong chin. I have tits and my legs are long. Oh, for God's sake!

Susan focused on the TV screen, a brilliant spark of color. The eight a.m. Miami news kicked off with a fire fight between the Pennsylvania Highway Patrol and a teamster cadre after diesel fuel. In Vermont, they were shooting wood thieves at the side of the road. Then came the latest skirmish in the Arizona-California war over the water.... At least in Boston she would have been totally involved in her profession instead of pissing away her life here in paradise....

The scene shifted to London, where Scottish nationalists wrecked two government buildings and killed a number of police. "No longer drunken soccer hooligans, the Scots were well-equipped with Mark Eleven Uzi automatics...." There was a knock on the door. Susan looked down at her drab and torn dressing gown and dashed from her living-room-kitchen combo into her small bedroom to pull on a halter and jean shorts, shouting, "Coming! Coming!" Who in Hell was calling at eight a.m. in Hopetown, for God's sake?

Susan smoothed her hair and pulled the door open. It was Frank Albury;

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This is the third in Hilbert Schenck's fine series of sf stories with a sea-going background in common ("Three Days at the End of the World," September 1977; "The Morphology of the Kirkham Wreck," September 1978). The story concerns, among many other things, the invasion of the Bahamian island of Abaco by an energy-starved United States, and it is the longest, richest and most exciting to date.

Battle Abaco Reefs

BY

HILBERT SCHENCK

well, one of the three Frank Alburys, the electronics one. "Hi, Susan," said the portly little man, "Can I talk with you a sec?" He was perhaps thirty-five, a small roll in the gut, and completely nondescript. With an even, round, bland face and thin blond hair, he ran the island C.B. operation. An electronic wizard, Jerry Ravetz had said, but all Frank had ever talked about with Susan was the discovery of Christ and scuba diving. And she shared in this second life, in his love of the water. The first time they went together to the outer reefs where the long, hot waves broke and the massive surge ebbed and flowed over the great coral heads, Susan imagined she entered the magical Lewis story of *Perelandra* and the floating islands on the great warm sea of never-Venus. Her father, a gentle classics professor, had read her all those books, Narnia, the Langs, *Lord of the Rings*, Oz; and as she rode the long surge of the reef looking down on its society, she flew over fairy kingdoms and the ride was magical.

But Albury watched the fish. Studying the fantastic interlocking detail of their behavior and survival, he understood absolutely that only God could make such an intricate puzzle fit together.

"Hi, Frank. Going scuba?" asked Susan.

Albury shook his head and shrugged. "Sure would like to, Susan, but we got some problems." He looked at

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her and rubbed his chin. Then he pointed at the TV. "You seen that fellow in Miami, that Abaco independence fellow?"

Susan didn't watch the TV much, but she had noticed an occasional reference on the Miami public station to such a group, one of the many splinter and terrorist gangs looking for fun and trouble in Florida. She smiled. "Is he coming over to run the place, Frank?"

Albury shrugged again. "Maybe. It looks like they got some planes and ships, Susan. From Munoz, the Florida Governor. We figure Munoz has some kind of understanding with Castro to let him go at us and Freetown, and maybe New Providence, while the Cubans work over the islands closest to them."

Susan laughed. "Come on, Frank! I realize the U.S. is coming apart at the seams, but an attack on Abaco from the state of Florida? Are they commandeering yachts?"

Albury sat down soberly at her table. "Susan, do you know about the satellite time-lease system?"

"Sure. The Third World rental military satellites open to anyone who can pay the rip-off price. You guys subscribers?"

"The Bahamian government is. We're monitoring Florida ship movements now, at highest resolution, and they've put a fleet to sea. All shallow-draft boats, tank-landing vessels with National Guard tanks, an old destroyer escort, some Coast Guard stuff."

"Coast Guard is federal, U.S. Treasury," said Susan.

"Susan, President Childers isn't minding the store. The governors are all going off on their own. We think Munoz is looking to set up his own Caribbean state and shut off the flow of U.S. northerners. The Abaco energy communes look awful handy."

"The Israelis would never work for Munoz."

Albury looked down at his Bermuda shorts and rubbed his chubby knees. "Munoz doesn't really understand what's going on out here. But he probably figures they'll either work or starve." He looked up. "Susan, there's a meeting of the Abaco Defense Council at ten this morning, and they asked me to come and see if you would attend?"

"The WHAT?" laughed Susan. "Abaco Defense Council! Who, those dolts at the customs shed?"

"More than that," said Albury seriously. "We have a command post at Marsh Harbor out at the Wind Commune Headquarters on Eastern Shore. If you could be there at ten, we surely would appreciate it, Susan."

After Frank Albury left, Susan turned to the commercial channels and sought news of the Abaco Independence Movement, but the morning talk and game shows were in full swing. The world was breaking into tiny splinters and these fools were mesmerized by garbage...! Susan shook her head angrily and watched the simper-

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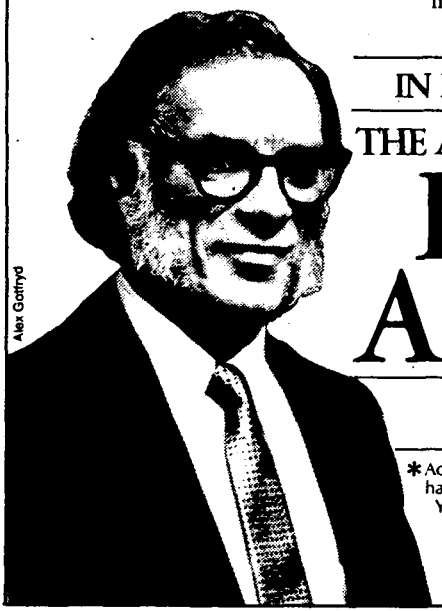

Alex Gotfryd

IN MEMORY YET GREEN

THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF

ISAAC ASIMOV

1920-1954

*Actually, Isaac likes to keep his publishers happy, so he has written *two* "200th books." You'll also find *Opus 200*, published by Houghton Mifflin, at booksellers now.

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ing host lead a young woman through some personal sex questions.... She flicked off the set and stared out at the palms and the gentle, sunny morning. Off across the brilliant blue and green Sea of Abaco the squat solar boilers centered in their mirror nests bulked behind the palms and white houses on Man-o-War Cay. The causeways and locks of the tidal-basin control system joined Elbow and Man-o-War by an incomprehensible network of underwater walls and control gates, all operated from a concrete building on tiny Johnnies Cay, a white spider sitting in a huge web of life and energy.

Susan rubbed her hands together and bitterly stared about her small house. Four months, and she knew nothing about this place, these people! Her book on Shastri cycles untouched. Her U.N. duties carried out just as perfunctorily as the locals could hope, from an uninvited snooper checking to see that UNESCO money wasn't decorating casinos or whore houses.

She had made only a few friends, and most of them among the Israelis, the other arrivés. Face it. Frank Albury was the only Abacoan who called her Susan. That's why they sent him this morning.

She rubbed her hands back and forth across her eyes until the flashes and spots came behind the lids, and she thought about taking the drug. She probably couldn't help them anyway; she hadn't done her homework on Abaco. Yet her only possibility would be to vector for them. She drew back and remembered her lover, intense, brilliant, corrupt Jamie. She had used the drug with him, but he did not believe in Shastri Vector Space. And he had told the committee she was addicted to cocaine. She lost the chairmanship. That bastard...! She still couldn't reconcile his tenderness and strength with....

Oh, Hell. She was going to dress and ride to the Marsh Harbor ferry. But just before she stepped out the door, she swallowed two small pills and popped the tiny box, not knowing what might happen or for how long, into her skirt pocket.

Pedaling south the mile to Hopetown harbor on her bike, Susan saw no one until she arrived at the ferry dock. There, several young Israelis and black Abacoans were wrestling some generator parts off a Wind Commune barge. The Donnie-Rocket glided into the dock right on time and disgorged several wind workers and some school children. Everything seemed very ordinary and peaceful, but the drug was doing its work and Susan vectored on the suppressed excitement among the children.

She waited quietly while they revved up the flywheel on the ferry, listening carefully to the children as they babbled, walking off down the dock.

"I is in D-south tracker, Joan!" said a little black boy excitedly. "Dat's de whole *end* of the system. I is *bound* to get some tracks." The boy looked back,

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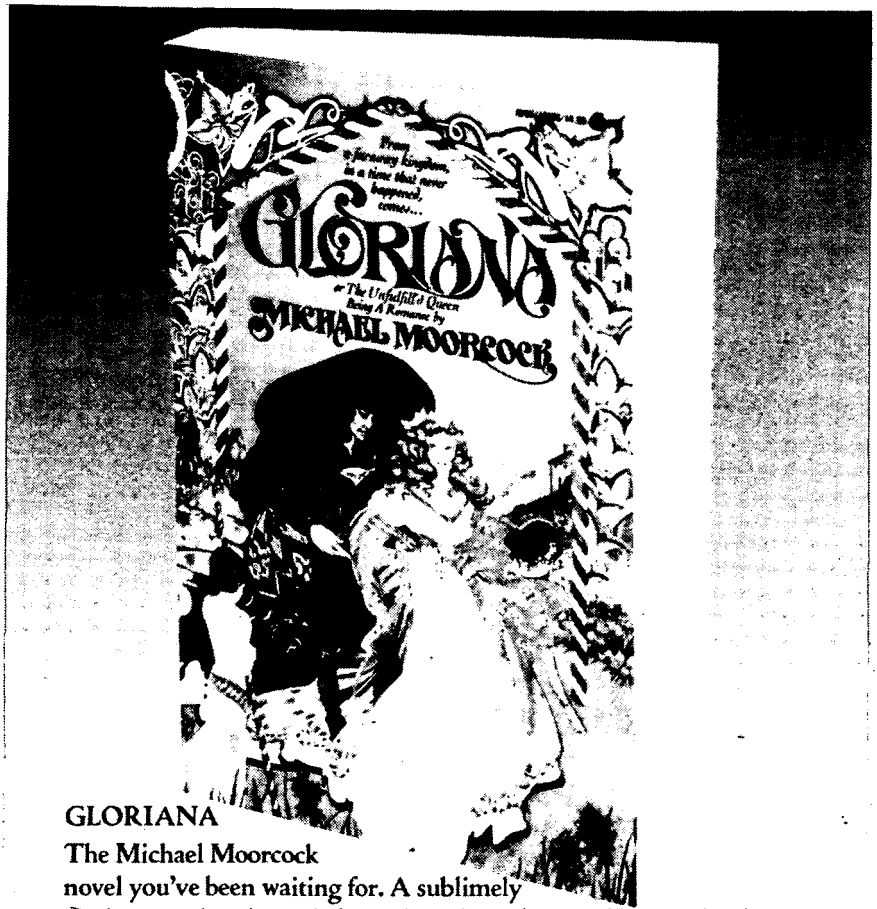

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saw Susan staring at him and abruptly and silently ran off the dock. The very incomprehensibleness of his conversation rang alarm bells in Susan's head. What in God's name were they up to? She turned back to watch the repowering of the Donnie-Rocket.

The large island of Abaco and its chain of cays to the north and east were linked and looped together by the ferry system. Originally, the Donnies had been I.C.-engined cabin cruisors, twenty to thirty feet in length. Then in the late seventies, the gas-turbined hovercraft, the Donnie-Rockets had arrived, spectacular, high speed, and kerosene guzzling. Although the relatively new Swiss flywheel boats now ran in total silence, the name, Donnie-Rocket, had stuck with them, for they still went like blazes, up on their stalky foils, forty feet of praying mantis doing thirty-five knots.

The captain of this Donnie-Rocket was skinny, fourteen-year-old Gerald Beans, black as night with a head like a chestnut burr. He cut off the magnetic clutch and signaled the dock superintendent to hoist the torque bar out of the Donnie's engine compartment. Down below, in a hard vacuum, six tons of steel flywheel spun in perfectly vibration-free gas bearings at over twenty-thousand revolutions per minute. Captain Beans noticed Susan's intense inspection of the Donnie-Rocket's power plant and flashed her a great many large white teeth. "Plenty of crayfish to buy that wheel, Dr. Peabody," he suggested.

But Susan, fully into the drug, suddenly, blindingly, saw how incredibly little she had seen in Abaco. These children and their talk. A fourteen-year-old ferry captain. This incredibly diverse technology. The Israelis, their energy communes, Governor Munoz and Fidel Castro. She was staggered at the vector complexity, and yet the alarm bell in her head was clanging continuously. She suddenly realized she had not thought of Jamie for at least ten minutes, and she smiled, really grinned in fact, at Captain Beans.

The Donnie-Rocket ambled out of Hopetown Harbor as a displacement boat, past the tall, old red-striped lighthouse with its 130-year-old Trinity House lamp and spring-driven occulting gear. Then Captain Beans clutched the propellers into the flywheel more strongly, and they rose up and scooted for Marsh Harbor. The only other passenger, an Israeli computer specialist whom Susan hardly knew was studying an instruction manual. So Captain Beans turned to Susan. "Did you see that crazy Abaco independence man on TV, Dr. Peabody?"

Susan shook her head. "I didn't watch it last night, Gerald. Is he really nutty?"

Gerald Beans whistled and nodded his head. "Mad as can be, I think. But he's not the real one, I think. Those politicians want us ... Abaco. All these kilowatts!"

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"Yes," said Susan. "We Americans had all the toys, but they've gotten broken and we waited too long to fix them. All we can see to do is steal from somebody else."

"Those folks up north, with the snows. Who are they going to steal from?" asked Captain Beans.

Susan, distracted in her attempts to vector Abaco and its problems, looked at the boy sharply. "They'll steal from each other, I suppose, Gerald. We had it awfully soft for a very long time."

"Then," said Captain Beans inexorably, "why won't Abaco get the same way?" and Susan found she had no answer.

The Donnie-Rocket made a side trip up Sugar Loaf Creek to drop Susan at the big dock of the Wind Commune Headquarters. For the first time she saw a group of young Abacoans with side arms and some Uzi whistle guns on slings. One of them, a customs agent in fact, detached himself and nodded politely. "They've been waiting for you, Dr. Peabody," he said. "Let me show you the way."

She followed the soldier in his short khaki pants and knee socks up a path brilliant with bougainvillaea, the soft coral crunching underfoot. As she walked, Susan watched a big instrument kite leave its launching rack on the top of the building and climb into the sky. The local wind communes in the South Abaco area were fed data from here, and from similar installations on Man-o-War and Hopetown. On-line computers continuously load-matched the entire system and updated weather predictions. Susan tried to remember who had worked the kites out. The Swedes? The French?

The soldier held open a door and Susan stepped into a large, dim, air-conditioned room with picture-window views of the entire horizon. Around the walls under the almost continuous windows were the various consoles of the wind engineers: instrument boards, video readouts, and interactive computer monitors. The entire center of the room was now filled with a long plain table at which sat perhaps twenty people. Susan looked at her watch. It was just ten. "Sorry," she said to the seated people, "Frank Albury told me...." she noticed Albury in a chair.... "You told me ten, Frank."

Albury popped to his feet and the other men followed. "You're right on time, Susan. We haven't started." They had, of course, started. They had been talking about her. Susan looked curiously around at the Abaco Defense Council and selected a chair next to Jerry Ravetz, towards which she walked. She was fully vectoring now, and selecting that chair had involved a certain extension of mental activity. She suddenly realized that Ravetz, with whom she was friendly, was perhaps the most important person in the room. Provost of the Abaco Technical College and called Jerry by almost

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everyone, Ravetz seemed to represent all the Israelis in Abaco in some generalized and unstructured way. And much of the new technology of Abaco, the energy farms, the huge, still-building thermocline system, the tidal impoundments running laminar-flow, low-head turbines, the crayfish farms, all were basically Israeli-engineered. As she mentally projected various vector trees, she began to see how it must have developed. Kilowatts were not the only problem!

"Hi, Jerry," she said firmly.

Ravetz smiled cheerfully. "Hi, Susan, sorry to bother you, but we do seem to have this little ... ah ... problem with the State of Florida." Several of the men around her grinned.

"You've got plenty of problems, Jerry," said Susan, and she did not smile. As was often the case of retrospective vectoring, the picture was clearing even as she spoke. "For one thing, you should never have left Fidel out of all this. Who else is Munoz thick with? There's some kind of Washington connection in this, Jerry."

Ravetz, a stocky, crew-cut man in his forties, wearing white tennis shorts and a purple T-shirt, blinked and let his smile slip away, turning to peer more carefully at Susan and her bright, sharp eyes. "It's a little late to get geopolitical, Susan. We may be under attack before dark."

At that moment a tall black man in the same simple khaki uniform as the soldiers walked briskly into the room. He was about forty, lean and muscled, and it was perfectly evident that now he was in charge. Susan looked and looked, then turned to Ravetz. "Who is that, Jerry?"

Ravetz smiled again. "Colonel John Gillam, C. in C. of all Abaco defense forces and presently the acting military governor of Abaco," he whispered.

"Jerry," said Susan rather more loudly than she intended, "that's my garbage man!"

Colonel Gillam turned and smiled frostily the length of the table at Susan. "I do the garbage when things are quiet, Dr. Peabody. It's a way of ... keeping an eye on things. I'm sure we'll have this Florida business under control in a day or so. Don't worry about the Friday pickup. I'll get your stuff." His voice was like ice. His eyes glinted and his big fat lower lip jutted red and wet at her. Susan flinched at the shock of his hostility. Here was one real hard conch eater, a North American hater. She was at this table over his dead body! He had obviously refused to even be present when they discussed what to tell her.

Jerry Ravetz pulled awkwardly at his T-shirt with its pink, Day-Glo words, "Crayfish Need Love Too," an obscure logo popular with biotechs. "Johnnie," he said quietly, "could we sort of get people introduced and go on?"

John Gillam sat down at the head of the table and pulled a sheet out of his briefcase. Well, OK, Jerry." He

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looked around. "Most of you know each other, but maybe some of you don't know who it is you know." He grinned at a young Israeli across from Susan. "Now Marv there is our boat man, kind of our admiral. He bosses the Donnie-Rockets, work boats, and the rest.

The Israeli grinned back. "Just so I don't have to go outside the reefs, John. I'm the Dramamine kid, you know."

"Communication," said Colonel Gillam, "is Frank Albury. You all know him. At ten this morning we put all C.B. on scrambler and took the lid off the broadcast power."

Frank looked around and gave them all a gentle smile. "John," he said softly, "could we have a short prayer before we get into this?"

Colonel Gillam shook his head. "You're the chaplain, Frank. But the time for that is when they're on the screens. OK?"

Several other men were introduced, and Susan suddenly noticed that there were only two other women in the room: Dr. Francis Foot, chief of the Abaco hospital; and Frank's niece, Mary Albury, whose main function seemed to be to select which computer outputs would be displayed and where. Susan looked at Gillam's coal-black face, the flat nose and high, shiny cheekbones. A black honky-hating macho garbage man, just what the crisis doctor ordered!

Colonel Gillam finally turned to Susan and said evenly, "Dr. Susan Peabody is a newcomer. As most of you know, when Professor Hollister of Princeton retired here, we approached him to advise us in our political relations with the U.S. Dr. Hollister had a stroke last month and this, ah, problem required us to bring in someone not familiar with our situation." Gillam paused and looked at some notes. "Dr. Peabody is a professor at Harvard and one of the founding members of the Department of Contemporary Politics, a current academic euphemism for crisis management. Dr. Peabody has come to Abaco as a U.N. Fellow and will make a report to UNESCO on the economic and political effects of our energy program and other developments."

The room suddenly became very quiet, and Susan realized they were waiting for something they had been told by Gillam would happen. The colonel looked at her steadily. "Before we go on, I'd like to ask you a couple of frank questions, Dr. Peabody. If you don't like them, or you don't like this situation, please feel free to go back to Hopetown. OK?"

Susan looked at him as evenly as she could. He radiated anger and resentment at her. She was suddenly standing in for Castro, Governor Munoz and God knows who else. "Shoot, Colonel."

Gillam took a deep breath. "We're probably going to be attacked by American forces today. If you have

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any doubts about which side you might be on, or if you think you might play U.N. lady bountiful or peace dove, please just go away."

Even the whites of his eyes were brown. He was a most thoroughly colored man. Susan looked steadily into the brown-on-brown eyes. "My tenure with the U.N. is six months, Colonel. They've already forgotten I'm here. As far as any choice between you or Governor Munoz, I'll take you and the rest here, even though you hate my bloody guts and wish I were dead."

That was vector talk, right down the middle. Colonel Gillam looked at his papers. "I don't hate you, Dr. Peabody. I don't know you."

Susan shook her head. "You can't imagine why we, and I mean Harvard and the State Department and all the big shots who have patronized and snooted you here for years, are now throwing you to Munoz and Castro. Because it's coming apart up there, Colonel! President Childers is yellow to the core and incompetent besides. We counted on more time than the Arabs gave us, than the Arabs could ever give us. Do you know there's a cruise missile battalion in north Florida? Munoz hasn't got much now, but give him some successes, and who knows? Federal troops have gone over to a state before in our history. So hate away, all of you!"

Jerry Ravetz sat up in his chair and cleared his throat. "Johnnie," he said plaintively, "don't we need all the help we can get? There's nobody else here who knows the U.S. situation like Susan. You said yourself, her professional field is crisis management. What do you want, somebody in English lit. for Heaven's sake?"

Colonel Gillam nodded grimly. "Welcome to the Abaco Defense Force, Dr. Peabody," he said evenly. Then, "OK, Frank, let's show everyone last night's TV spec."

Frank Albury nodded to an assistant at one of the consoles and a big, flat solid-state screen dropped over the north window and began to flicker. "You mostly saw this before," said Frank.

The TV tape cut into the eleven o'clock news and a black woman who gave a short spiel on the Abaco Independence Movement and introduced its leader, one Basham Kondo, dressed in flowing robes and a bushy afro. Basham had hardly gotten into his slurring, high-speed speech about the enslaved blacks of Abaco and the many Alburys and their Yiddish masters from across the sea, when the screen blanked and retracted. "Sorry," said Frank Albury gently, "but the prime minister is coming down on the roof."

The swish of big rotor blades above slowed and then they heard a flurry of footsteps. The far door opened and in swept Prime Minister Sean O'Malley and an entourage of two uniformed and two seersuckered assistants. The old man walked rapidly over to Colo-

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nel Gillam and briskly shook his hand. O'Malley was light coffee-colored with a white, kinky poll and a grandfatherly look. Susan suddenly remembered parlor car rides on the New Haven Railroad with her father when she was a very little girl. There was always one porter who was sort of the Old Boss Man, the Chief, and they had all looked exactly like Bahamian Prime Minister Sean O'Malley.

"Colonel," said O'Malley, "don't let us interrupt or slow you up. This is your battle. I'm here if there should be any policy problems." Susan tried to remember what sort of strength the Bahamian navy possessed. Customs and fishery protection vessels certainly, but with what caliber arms? If Florida had a DE.... No, no, there was much more to this. These men weren't fools. Susan vectored continuously but the tree was too open, too diffuse. She had been all over Abaco. Where could they have the emplacements? The magazines? What about aircraft? Susan looked up startled to see Ravetz and O'Malley bearing down on her.

"Dr. Peabody," said the old man, "Jerry tells me you've agreed to help us and that you're a crisis expert. You couldn't be in a better place!" He shook her hand strongly. "Jerry," he said, "can't we get back to whatever you were doing? I know you have plenty of things to get ready."

Colonel Gillam beckoned for more chairs. "We were watching a replay of last night's extravaganza."

O'Malley's face registered the distaste of a man handed an overfilled diaper. "Well, I've watched it twice, but once more can't hurt."

Everyone adjusted chairs, the screen came down again, and that great lover of freedom and justice, Basham Kondo, told south Florida the way it was. When it ended, Ravetz turned immediately to Susan. "How in the devil can he go on with that Yiddish and Zionist masters baloney? Don't the Jews in Florida listen to TV or vote?"

Susan shrugged. "Demographics. The old old Jews are dying off and the new ones don't come down any more. Munoz and his Cuban gang disavow the worst stuff, but they know how the Sunbelt is going." She turned and looked directly at Colonel Gillam. "Is that man, that Kondo, an Abacoan, Colonel?"

Gillam snorted in disgust. "He worked here as a crayfish harvester but his work record was hopeless. We think he was born on the Berry Islands and his name was Smythe, but it's hard to trace drifters like that. He has perhaps two dozen with him, similar types, misfits from the out islands."

"He wasn't much of a find for Munoz," said Susan thoughtfully, "but I suppose he was the only game in town. Mr. Prime Minister, what steps are you taking in the U.S. about this fleet?"

O'Malley turned to Susan in surprise. "Why, my ambassador to the

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U.S. is carrying a note of protest to the Security Council this morning...."

"Good Grief," said Susan impatiently, "I don't mean that Tower of Babel. Why they won't even know where Abaco *is*, with no casinos, racetracks, or fancy houses. I'm talking about Federal District Court in Miami. Don't you have a law firm there that can get on this for you?" She looked around quickly. "Does any one have a copy of the Florida state constitution? I'm sure you can nail Munoz on at least a dozen violations of his authority in Dade County. With a federal restraining order, the Coast Guard will have to function. Furthermore, you can get injunctions so that Federal marshals and state police must keep his Guard planes on the ground. They couldn't be coming over with a fleet and no air cover. These are simple, traditional thinkers, Mr. Prime Minister. Break this chain anywhere and they'll crawl back into the woodwork!"

The room fell silent as everyone looked at everyone else. Colonel Gillam looked grimly at Susan but said nothing. Finally Prime Minister O'Malley's ancient face broke into a grin. "I'm chagrined, Dr. Peabody, that we did not think of that," he said gracefully, then turned and nodded to an assistant in a seersucker suit. The man rose and hurriedly left the room. Frank Albury also stood up, smiling at everyone. "I'll make sure he gets through on priority to Miami," he said. "We have protected channels through the satellite link." And he dashed out.

For the next hour they watched the successive satellite transmissions of high-magnification video showing the invasion fleet assembling in calm waters off Palm Beach. There were Naval Reserve and Coast Guard vessels from Port Everglades, National Guard tank-landing vessels from Fort Lauderdale and Miami, and a collection of state fishery and patrol craft. A young Abacoan stood up and gave the intelligence appreciation; twenty-nine craft, approximately twelve hundred crewmen and about fifteen hundred troops, tank personnel, and drivers. E.T.A. at present course and speed, assuming a Marsh Harbor destination, eight p.m.

While they were awaiting an update from the satellite, Prime Minister O'Malley slipped into a chair next to Susan. "Dr. Peabody, at what level of combat do you think the U.S. federal government might intervene?"

Susan looked sideways at the shrewd old face. "That would depend on who was winning, Dr. O'Malley."

O'Malley looked at her very piercingly, as though seeing her for the first time, and then smiled thinly. "Let's assume we are overwhelmed here and Fidel takes a hand at New Providence, Andros, and points south."

Susan jerked her head around and spoke fiercely, directly at him. "That *must* not happen. You must *never* count on Washington! Don't you understand? That's exactly what they want!"

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Her vehemence startled O'Malley. "Who, Dr. Peabody? Who would want that?" he asked softly.

"Munoz's friends, of course. You don't think he got this together without help in Washington, do you? He's being used!"

"But, Fidel?"

"My God, the same! Fidel's a puppet, a decoy. He's their next step. The Bahamas, Abaco, mean nothing to them. Dr. O'Malley, have you ever heard of Shastri cycles...? No, no, let's not get into that. This may be blunted." Susan shook her head staring at the old brown man.

"Do you have any idea who these people in Washington are, Dr. Peabody?"

Susan nodded. "Yes, but there is nothing you can do here and now about this, Dr. O'Malley, except stop the war. And if it starts, win as quietly as possible."

Susan was vectoring powerfully. She had never achieved this formidable a high, and the great integrating power of her amplified consciousness created clouds of possibilities, the Shastri vector trees, growing and bunching in the created spaces of her mind. The whole development was transparent to her, Munoz, Castro, the cabal of horrible old men in Washington, made by disaster and uncertainty into monsters more fearsome than the rawest, maddest S.S. camp commandant in the worst days at the end of the last great convulsion of a Shastri cycle, over forty years ago. But through some incredible chance (or mischance, that would only vector clearly after the attack was met), these Florida amateurs had decided to drown a pussy cat that was looking more and more like a hungry tiger. As she waited in an ecstasy of speculation and computation, she thought briefly again of Jamie, naked, his cock wilting that night she had dazzled him with the theory of the Shastri cycle. She realized suddenly that he had never been even close to her in intelligence or ability, and it seemed odd that she had never seen that now-obvious fact.

At that moment, Frank Albury said, "Governor Munoz is on Channel Seven, impromptu news conference on the capital steps." The screen flashed in bright color, and there was Munoz, a short, stocky brown man with a thick mustache and receding hair, waving at some supporters. Around him were his guards and staff, black, brown, and white, as befits the modern Southern governor.

"Governor, is it true the State of Florida is supporting an invasion of the Bahamas?" The question came from off screen.

Munoz passed a hand across his brow. "We're not supporting anything. As I understand it, there may be a volunteer group attempting to liberate certain islands in the Bahamas group. In all fairness, I think...."

Another reporter shouted, "Is it true that John Amsler of Amsler, Big-

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elow and Parke is in Federal District Court right now getting a restraining order on moving those ships into Bahamian waters?"

Munoz shrugged. "That's between the feds and their people. If they can't control discipline on the cutters, that's hardly Florida's problem."

Now there were several reporters shouting at once. "Governor, what if they get an order in Dade County restraining the state and National Guard boats?"

Munoz held up his hand. "Look, let me make a statement. It's simply this. Washington, the federal government, is no longer able to protect or even deal with regional interests. When we had everything, it was easy to resolve these differences. With the price of oil at its present level, it's become impossible. Now, the State of Florida has no intention of encouraging a foreign power, a very controversial and bloody-minded foreign power ... I'm talking about Israel. Let's please get that straight ... to penetrate to within one hundred miles of the Florida mainland, displacing as it does hundreds of poor blacks and disturbing the only friends who count today, and I obviously mean the Arab nations. The health, safety, and good life of all Floridians is the only thing that motivates me. This administration is...."

Suddenly a small young woman popped into camera range, her pad pointing and waving at Munoz. "Then you intend to violate the law, Governor? You intend to defy any court order to ground the Guard jets?"

Munoz shook his head mildly but his magnified eyes were as thin and cold as a snake's. "I have no such intention. This office will obey all federal and state laws and orders of the courts. This office...."

A red light over the C.B. speaker rack went on, and all sound in the room went suddenly dead. Then came a cool young voice on a C.B. monitor. "Attention! Attention, Abaco! This is Argus North. I have twenty-six, single-seat bandits leaving the Florida coast. Estimated flight time to Little Abaco, seventeen minutes!"

Susan took an involuntary deep breath. Governor Munoz would evidentally obey the courts' orders by flying his weapons before the orders arrived.

Colonel Gillam made two long steps to the C.B. center and pressed a protected red button. Priority lights shone all across the monitors and Gillam's voice was multiply projected, still clear and sharp. "This is Big John. Prepare for air attack. All trackers make final calibrations now. All protection vessels, put to sea at once. Argus North, take direction. Execute!"

"Ten-four, Big John. Trackers all, this is your Argus North. We will number targets consecutively and assign you in groups. Report your calibrations to subdivision leaders as available. I repeat...."

John Gillam turned and grimly

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nodded at Frank Albury. "Time for that prayer, Frank," he said softly.

Albury stood up and looked out over the room. "Please bow your heads, whatever you may believe," he said in his gentle voice. "Dear Lord, we do not kill and maim our fellow men in Thy name, but because Thy Kingdom has not yet been achieved on this sinful world. Forgive us our pride and our cruelty, for we are imperfect seekers after Thy Truth, and though our sins offend Thy sight, bless us in simple love, we Abacoans and our friends from Thy ancient lands of Israel, Amen."

"This is ... your Argus North. Our bandits are dividing their forces. We anticipate twelve to attack north from Cherokee Sound. E.T.A. Cherokee, nine minutes."

Colonel Gillam turned to Frank Albury. "Picture, Frank!" The big screen showed a radar presentation, a glowing map of the Abaco chain. "Project that squadron at twenty-X, Mary," said Gillam.

Twelve bright dots, moving far faster than in real time swept across the southern Bight of Abaco and out over Tilloo Cay. "Argus South, are you tracking?"

"I see the picture, Big John," came a new voice. "Trackers all, Marsh Harbor and south, this is your Argus South. We will number targets consecutively...."

Susan watched all this intently. By God, they *could* keep a secret here! What in Hell? "Jerry," she started to say....

"Urgent! This is Argus North! Enemy in sight! Six bandits on the deck! Numbering consecutively: target one, batteries A and B; target two...."

Colonel Gillam peered out the window to the northwest. "Frank," and now he could not conceal the tightness in his voice, "optical blow on these first ones."

The screen flickered and then a projected telescope image showed two large jet aircraft head on, their images made wavery by the intervening hot air layers, growing in size slowly. Suddenly the closer one's wings showed two bright flashes. "He's firing rockets, Johnnie!" Susan could hardly recognize Ravetz's voice, it was dry and tense. Colonel Gillam grinned fiercely.

"This is Big John. All shutters open! Execute!"

Susan looked out at Man-o-War Cay and she seemed to see a glitter, a sudden flash as though lightning had darted across the distant low land. The two jets came at 600 miles an hour south east down the Sea of Abaco just off the water and heading for Marsh Harbor, a huge, growing roar. In an instant the leading plane cartwheeled and splashed gigantically. His wing man went into a sudden vertical climb, up and up north of them, and Susan could see without magnification that the plane was glowing red. Smoke began to plume from the entire fuselage, and the pilot ejected, a black bundle.

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But the bundle smoked too, and when the chute opened, it was no more than a bag of tatters.

Now the C.B. monitors were alive with urgent talk.

"Track! Track! Carol! Hold your target!"

"Harden my focus, Benji!"

"Left, B Battery, Left!"

Planes were coming in on several angles now. One of the southern group went direclty over them and crashed within a hundred yards of the harbor at Man-o-War. Two more went south on fire, and a third was glowing so brightly that it simply blew apart before ever smoking at all.

Susan turned to Ravetz, her surprise unconcealed."Solar weapons, Jerry! You're using the mirrors on the energy farms!"

Colonel Gillam turned and his smile was now cruel and twisted. "Not quite what UNESCO had in mind, eh, Dr. Peabody? But on the right day, a nasty toy. You see, even if we don't hold them in the mirror battery's focus long enough to cook them, it's usually long enough to blind them. Of course, if they had brought welding goggles they might stop that, but it's hard to strafe nigger conch-eaters when you're wearing welding goggles!"

"This is Argus South! Batteries M and N, redirect to target eleven. You're tracking too fast, Dawn!"

"I got two already, Argus!" The girl's voice was high and tense, total excitement. "Harden my focus!" she shrieked; then: "Mine's on fire! Mine's burning!"

"Jerry," said Susan thickly. "That's Dawn LaVere! That child is only fifteen! What in Hell are you doing here?"

But now Ravetz looked at her coldly and his voice was low, yet as hard as Gillam's. "Cut the shit, Susan! Don't you see it yet? This is a Shastri community. We're living what you people gave seminars on. You've been too close to it!"

And Susan, watching horrified another ejection at one hundred feet, this time the pilot enclosed in a bright orange tongue of flame, suddenly saw the whole puzzle unfold and, in chagrin, put all the pieces into place.

A jet came over Matt Lowes Cay firing cannon at Marsh Harbor, and Gillam raged into the mike. "Argus South! We're being hurt by target sixteen!"

"A-OK, Big John! We're tracking sixteen! Carrie, you're too low! Track! Track!"

The plane continued over the town and crashed into the Bight of Abaco to the west.

Susan turned firmly to Colonel Gillam. "Colonel, stop! Let some of them go home, for God's sake!"

Gillam whirled on her. "To their fucking subdivisions and their insurance offices? To their darky babysitters and cleaning women!" he shouted.

Susan shrank before his anger, but she stared resolutely back. "Probably a

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third of those pilots are black, Colonel," she said bitterly. "You're living in another age. I don't give a damn about those men, but if you kill them all, if you win absolutely, it's almost impossible to vector the effect!"

She whirled on Ravetz. "Jerry, you fool! What would Shastri have said? This is a Shastri community? Bullshit! You're all on raving ego trips!" She spun again, frantic. "Mr. O'Malley! I said you must win, but *quietly!* Don't you understand...."

But it was too late.

"Trackers all, this is your Argus North. We have zero ... repeat zero targets! We are checking the tapes now, hang on.... Trackers all! We have twenty-six kills! We wiped the sky clean!"

The C.B. monitors lit up like a Christmas tree and a confusion of shouts and cheers burbled out. To the north, several huge meteorological balloons surged upward carrying fluttering Bahamian and Israeli flags. Wind-pattern smoke rockets flew skyward from Marsh Harbor and Hopetown painting sudden red vertical columns as high as the eye could see, and over it all came the high, sexy, excited voice of Dawn LaVere. "Ohhhh, Big John! I got five! I'm an ace ... an ACE!"

Susan felt a real chill of panic. She looked around the room at the arrested figures, many of them still unable to believe what they had done, yet already believing and starting to live in a world in which it had happened.

"Well," she said soberly, suddenly remembering with a real pang of love her cheerful, gentle father and one of his favorite Yankeeisms, "You all really pissed on the stove this time!"

Cleaning up after the great battle consisted mainly of locating the pilots' bodies or getting them out of the sunken planes, and this grim business was taken in hand at once by Marv, the Donnie-Rockets, and the biotech scuba teams.

"For," said Colonel Gillam to Susan in as deliberately callous a way as possible, "We wouldn't want any missing-in-action problems, would we? All those wives petitioning your Congress? They're going to get everything back, the charcoaled remains, the dogtags, and the TV tapes showing just how and where we put the sun in their cockpits!"

Susan, sitting slumped in a chair, shook her head. "Come off it Colonel!" she said with irritation. "Neither the Florida National Guard or the Pentagon is going to want to talk about this very much. Those widows will be an embarrassment to Munoz, all right, but the press will probably represent the pilots as undisciplined and incompetent adventurers. No, no. You're missing the point. Once the power centers hear that an exuberant bunch of thirteen-year-old colored kids and sexy-poos like Dawn can total two squadrons of jets without a single local casualty, they're going to look much closer at Abaco and this Israeli thing.

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They've been looking and thinking plenty already, and I specifically mean Fidel."

Prime Minister O'Malley, who had watched, wide-eyed and silent, the first great battle of the Abaco reefs, now turned to Ravetz.

"Jerry, I think this is all unbelievable, too miraculous to take in. But I find Dr. Peabody's words more and more disturbing. Could we talk...?"

"Hang on, everybody!" Frank Albury dashed into the room with some tapes. "It looked like the invasion fleet had stopped, but now it's headed our way again."

The cheerful chatter in the room stopped abruptly. "E.T.A., Frank?" said Gillam.

"Hard to say, John, right at this minute. They aren't really up to speed yet."

Susan started. She had completely forgotten the fleet! Hastily she rose and located a ladies' room and went into the toilet to take two more pills. This continuous confrontation with Gillam was wearing her down. She sat, resting and alone, on the cool john and rubbed her eyes. How was it possible that a Shastri community ... for Ravetz had been absolutely right in so describing Abaco, she saw that with blinding clarity ... could trigger a Shastri cycle? Or, as Shastri had called it, a spasm, for completed cycles were always accompanied by a multitude of unvectorable changes. Ravetz was right. In the seminars you could always keep things in their compartments; but the moment the insights became more than theoretical, the moment you built a community, weapons, life patterns, tools, ideals, then you rippled the pond; and the more successful and radical the insight, the more ripples there were. Susan gave herself five minutes of luxury, a mental vector investigation of the mirror weapon in all its Shastrian ramifications. Ravetz, or someone in Israel ... or, what the Hell, Archimedes if you like! ... had achieved an almost perfect Shastri null-weapon. A weapon so totally integrated into the community that it had no vector strength whatever in most of the critical and dangerous areas. Such as standing armies and their officer corps, almost always more destabilizing than the real and imagined enemies they faced. And all the idle, extraneous, deadly hardware. Susan wondered how much extra it cost to turn the solar heating mirrors into weapons; they had to move in altitude and azimuth to track the sun anyhow. Ten percent for the control stations, logic chips, and hard wire connections? Probably not even that much. And the beautiful, Shastrian idea that in destroying the weapon, an attacker would be destroying the very reason for his attack; the booming energy wealth of the Bahamas in a world of dry oil wells. And the fact that it could only be used part of the time and only for defense, a fatal flaw no doubt in the tired imaginations of the old incompetents at the Pentagon,

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was completely in accord with that essential, really primary Shastri vector: self-realization and the necessity for diverse answers in a society.

The greatest enemy in the Shastri canon was traditional systems analysis, the so-called single-vector analysis in which cost, profit, growth, safety, or some other single value dictated a decision. Of course, without the drug they really had to use single-vector analysis; they could not control the vector tree, could not see the cloud of, not end points, but *extensions of now.* Susan suddenly grinned. How it worked! Gerald Beans went to school, but he captained a high-speed foil boat of the most sophisticated sort. Dawn LaVere, with her pouty red mouth, mellon breasts, and tanned white flanks that Ravetz had described as simultaneously a treasure and a disaster ... she with five kills against modern agressively flown jets. The vector tree always showed that there were several equally good solutions to a problem. This diversity lead to wealth and to more diversity, to a social system in which almost everyone could gain somewhere a sense of themselves and their integration into their community. The children were cast in that role by age, but they were also full-fledged and useful members of Abaco society. Doubtless the Israelis had found their tracking reflexes superior to any adults. Susan had to agree, Shastri would have absolutely approved of that! It totally nulled the whole hero, macho, glory, bravery vector so excruciatingly dominant in war-beset, single-vector societies, so utterly useless in a Shastri society where heroes were replaced by experts, by persons whose confidence comes from their heads, not their balls or that mystical "backbone" her New England father made reference to when he really had no idea why someone behaved, or failed to behave, in a particular way.

But there was still a problem with the children! That most elusive of all vectors, ethics, the vague, but powerful human-based standards, how a society thinks about itself. Five dead men, fathers of children like Dawn LaVere, but prepared to kill Dawn and her black and Israeli friends from on high, impersonally as pilots always did. Dawn knew she directed the mirrors because she, and that little boy at the dock — God, twelve? thirteen? — they were the best in the community at that task. *They* knew and the *community* knew, that was important. And, yet, the children also know, many never be able to forget, that they burned those men! Susan rubbed and rubbed her eyes. Will Dawn love differently, or not be able to love, because she burned five pilots? Five bastards! Five of the main fucking reasons why there's burning in the world....

The ladies' room door opened. "Susan, you OK, honey?" It was Mary Albury.

"OK, Mary. I sort of fell asleep for a sec."

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"Oh, don't I know it! This is really too much for everybody. Listen, honey, the new stuff on the boats is coming in, and Dr. O'Malley wondered if...."

"Be right out, Mary. Thanks." Susan washed her hands and thought of Frank Albury and decided she would take up the matter of the children with him.

They were all seated when she returned, watching a blow-up of the satellite pictures of the fleet, which was apparently steaming at about eight knots so as to bring it into Abacoan waters well after dark. Susan saw that Dr. O'Malley was now across the table from her, and as soon as the pictures ended, he turned to Colonel Gillam. "I think I'd like to hear Dr. Peabody's appreciation, Colonel," he said a trifle stiffly.

Colonel Gillam inclined his head, and O'Malley turned immediately to Susan. "Why are they still coming, Dr. Peabody?"

"At what level do you want to discuss that, Dr. O'Malley, the fleet itself, Munoz, or his helpmeets in Washington?"

"All three, if you please," said O'Malley.

"Well, as to the fleet, I would imagine they left Florida with all communications, especially receiving stuff, radios and TVs, ripped out and confiscated. The one thing you folks didn't think about, Federal District Court, would be the *first* thing to occur to Munoz's gang. So they would have perhaps one man per ship with ways of talking either to the mainland or at least to a central communication vessel. That way, some judge can't get them on contempt, for failing to obey a court order which they claim they never got because they had twenty-nine busted radios. For this, the Coast Guard writes each captain a letter asking him to do better next time. Of course, they've been warned, through whatever hidden radios are left, about the solar weapons. So they're coming in at night."

O'Malley looked at her and shook his head. "They wouldn't be so stupid as to think we had no other arrows in the quiver? Master Kondo is doubtless a psychotic, but it defies belief...."

Susan shook her head. "Who knows what even Munoz's closest man in the fleet actually has found out? I'm sure the news and TV stations are filled with rumors of death rays and general wild talk...." She looked over at Frank Albury, who grinned and nodded vehemently. "The more important question is, why is Munoz still at this?"

"Exactly!" said O'Malley in a tense voice.

"Two reasons, I think. First, because he's already in plenty deep. If they could have gotten most of the pilots back, the thing might have dribbled away, a flaming sensation and nuisance, but something that could be

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handled. But all twenty-six ... that's what I was trying to tell you ... absolute victories are ... absolute. They have nonvectorable elements. Munoz is the gambler suddenly in over his head with one last buck in his pocket." Susan looked around the room and even Colonel Gillam sat silent.

"The second pressure is the scary one, the one on Munoz from Washington. He's had to have help all along, and he certainly couldn't keep the fleet coming without both help and, probably, pressure from that same direction. Do you see what that means, Dr. O'Malley?"

The old man nodded at once. "I do. It means they don't care whether they lose the fleet or capture Abaco. That has become irrelevant."

"Exactly!," said Susan, and the room became silent for many moments.

"Dr. Peabody, do you use political cocaine?" said Colonel Gillam. "Specifically, are you on it now?"

Susan flushed involuntarily and turned to face him. "I am, Colonel. I wouldn't dare attempt vector analysis without the drug."

"Dr. Peabody, I spent three years with the C.I.A., and much of my time was spent working with Shastri vectors," said Gillam coldly. "They established that the drug was not only unnecessary but gave erratic results. Crisis experts in Washington vector using computer branching and cluster algorithms."

Susan curled her lip. "Right! And look at the U.S. political turmoil! The reason, Colonel Gillam, that your beloved C.I.A. could never really work in Shastri vector space is that in 1981, President Carter suddenly eliminated the Drug Enforcement Administration, by then an international scandal, and turned the whole, nutty U.S. drug hunt over to the C.I.A., thereby making it absolutely impossible for them to make any serious studies of drug-enhanced decision-making."

Jerry Ravetz ran his hands through his crew cut and pinched his pudgy nose. "Well, this is my fault. I didn't take my pills today, Susan. Believe it or not, the first Shastri null-weapon battle, and I thought it would be so simple I wouldn't need all that vectoring. I wanted to savor it emotionally instead of being endlessly into all that damn thinking."

"I didn't know you used the political cocaine, too, Jerry?" said Colonel Gillam stiffly.

"You never asked, Johnnie, and I didn't offer to tell," said Ravetz quickly. "The point is, Susan was right this noon and she's right now. We're in the initial stages of a Shastri cycle. Somehow the Abaco community has triggered it, chance, something else, I just don't know."

"Yes," said Gillam angrily, "providing we all believe in this drug-fevered hokum! Jerry, the C.I.A. used Shastri's stuff all the time, but they vectored on a computer."

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Ravetz shook his head firmly. "No way! Johnnie, the C.I.A. showed you a lot of useful stuff, but you can't vector in real time on a computer. It's simply impossible. It takes weeks to write even a rudimentary program, and by then the crisis, decision, or whatever is past."

"Jerry, this drug, what is it anyway?" asked Sean O'Malley.

"Okay," said Ravetz, turning to look at everyone, "Quickly, here it is for those who don't know the story ... or have the wrong one. Bar Singh Shastri was an Indian pharmacologist and general all-around genius working in a London hospital on synthesis problems. He got into cocaine as a recreational drug in the early seventies, but it had the same effect on Shastri as on Freud. He gained intellectual power, or at least felt he did, and set about searching for that part of the cocoa plant that carried the intellectual part of the high. Well, eventually he managed to isolate and synthesize a group of alkaloids that apparently reduce the time delay at the nerve synapses. They do other things as well, but the effect is that the mind can carry many more coherent thoughts simultaneously, in parallel, and can process thoughts more quickly. Short-term memory is also enhanced. Interestingly, even though Shastri was a really top-level scientist, he immediately recognized that his enhanced abilities under the drug would be most extended and useful in a political context. He ran for Parliament and spent three years forming a brilliant political career, then dropped it all and went to Israel, becoming a recluse to study and write. Shastri was far beyond becoming the first Indian prime minister of Britain. He had found a way to reorganize the world using vectoring and the vector tree. Most of you know where the theory leads: null-weapons, multiple, labor-intensive energy communes, decisions based on vectoring a cloud of factors."

Prime Minister O'Malley rubbed his cheek and shrugged. "Well, Dr. Peabody, what projection do you ... ah ... see? Why do they attack us but not care if they win?"

"A Shastri cycle," said Susan, "can progress in two ways. With primarily external vector interactions, such as Europe in 1914, or with primarily internal vector interactions, such as Germany in 1939. We are in an internal cycle, in which a small, very powerful group in Washington is attempting to escalate a twenty-six plane raid on Abaco into, I'm afraid, an open-ended, transcontinental-level nuclear strike interchange. If you defeat the Florida navy, and expecially if you defeat it as decisively as you did the jets, they will attempt, and they obviously have considerable hope of doing it or they wouldn't be taking these risks, to induce Fidel to fall upon you. Or at least make demands upon you."

Susan looked from Ravetz to Prime Minister O'Malley. "The Bahamas

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government has an agreement with Israel to accept some substantial number of refugees, if the Palestine situation becomes irretrievable. That's correct, isn't it?"

The room now remained very quiet for some time. O'Malley's face flushed darkly, but then the smooth brown calm slowly returned. "You know, Dr. Peabody, that was a very carefully held confidence between our governments that you perceived."

"Yes," said Susan coolly, "but Fidel perceived it too. I won't attempt to guess how many might come, one-hundred thousand perhaps? But it would totally transform the Bahamas, this end of the Caribbean. And now Fidel sees that these Israelis, far from dancing the hora and raising yummy crayfish, have the strike of a cobra. No doubt your plans for the Florida navy are equally spectacular, and Fidel can watch them on his own satellite link, and what do you think will happen after that? All of you?"

Susan looked around. She had to vector them too. They must be led to this, inescapably. She looked at her watch. Four thirty, and the fleet here a little after midnight! She took a deep breath. "Munoz's bosses in Washington, through some ghastly chance, have stumbled into something that could be an all-win situation. If Abaco falls, Munoz will taste blood and go for Freeport. Fidel will have to move or have a far more hostile and expansionist neighbor than yourself, Dr. O'Malley. If, as they now probably expect, Florida goes down to defeat, they throw Munoz to the wolves, who will really be howling at this point, and panic Fidel with now-documented stories of Israeli superiority and hegemony in the Caribbean.

"In either case," and Susan paused and looked around the silent room, "the end result is a move by Cuba against the Bahamas followed by a spasm strike from the U.S. to protect freedom, save Jews, stop Communism, or whatever best serves them. One of the first conclusions Shastri came to when he began to use drug-enhanced analysis was that once the cycle reached a nuclear-explosion level, it could be driven to conclusion. The very fact of a burst over, say, Havana or Miami, would enable a leader to induce other crews and commanders to fire, whatever the dampers or restraints."

Sean O'Malley nodded. "And so, Dr. Peabody?"

"And so, Dr. O'Malley, we must immediately attempt to get Fidel here, tonight ... to Abaco ... and let him watch the big show. And, Jerry, you must decide how to get your government to send Israeli energy communes to Cuba and, I suppose, how to convince them to go."

"It's impossible!" spat Ravetz in sudden anger. "There's no way to vector that through, Susan. Cut the crap! You know what Cuba's like!"

Susan stared calmly at him. "What's it like, Jerry?"

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Ravetz spluttered, "Phony elections, snooping! Secret police! Come on, Susan!"

"Listen," said Susan. "Cuba has softened and Fidel is old. And you Israelis have something big to offer, bigger than anyone else can offer. A transformed society *within* Communism! Shastri showed that multivector planning *requires* a collective approach. Everybody has to give somewhere in this, Jerry. The point is, once Fidel sees a Shastri society at work, he'll be like a child after candy."

"That bastard won't come here!" said Colonel Gillam. "Mr. Prime Minister, I'll resign if...."

Sean O'Malley looked darkly at Susan. "Even if I were willing to see the man, what could we offer him? It may be possible in your computer crisis-gaming to call up dictators and have them run over, Dr. Peabody, but in the real world such talks require weeks of preparation...."

"Nonsense!" said Susan fiercely. "Fidel is aware of Shastri concepts. Say that you'll talk with him about sharing all this. Just talk!"

O'Malley, flushed and angry, shook his head. "You don't understand. What do I do? Call him on the C.B.? I tell you...."

"Dr. O'Malley," said Susan, "if Frank Albury can get me Major José Martino at the Department of State in Havana on diplomatic channels, that is guarded channels, it may be possible. But you've got to agree...." She turned and looked at Colonel Gillam, her lips a thin line. "Before you resign, Colonel, you might consider that Fidel will certainly be more fascinated by your efforts than, say, me. The Cuban military forces are ... crack. If those had been Cuban jets, you probably wouldn't have burned them all and you would have lost some mirrors too!"

"Who is this Major Martino, Dr. Peabody?" asked O'Malley and he suddenly sounded worn and tired.

Susan smiled. "A Shastri scholar. He studied with Shastri the same time I was in Israel. He is close to Fidel, Dr. O'Malley. Nobody is handing the Bahamas to anyone, just remember that. What it really amounts to is you extending your good offices to assist in getting energy communes in to Cuba. Of course Jerry is right. There are political problems aplenty. But *they won't get smaller!*"

O'Malley squared his shoulders. "All right. Let's try it. Mr. Albury, my Mr. Steen will assist you in putting through the call." Steen, a middle-aged black in seersucker shorts walked to a communications panel on the west wall and began dialing on a picture phone.

Susan turned and stared coldly at Colonel Gillam. "I've been assuming through all this that there will be a show for Fidel tonight, Colonel, and I don't mean a rifle regiment running ashore on Elbow Cay!"

"That," said Gillam bitterly, "is the

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one and only certainty in any of this. If the bastards come ashore, they'll be swimming!"

"Susan," called Frank Albury, "Major Martino is on the hook!"

Susan jumped up and ran across the big room, dropping into the seat vacated by Steen. "José, how are you old friend?" said Susan quickly, looking at the thin officer's image, with his slicked hair and tiny pencil mustache, smiling primly at her.

"Hello, Susan. I knew you were on Abaco and I hoped we would talk." Susan took her deepest breath of the day and held it for a moment.

"José, we may have a chance to socialize but there is now an urgent problem. A Shastri cycle has begun, José."

She watched his brown color fade on the screen, and then he blinked several very long blinks. "Abaco ... Susan?..."

"...And Cuba," she finished relentlessly.

"I cannot see it, Susan. I sensed there were deeper problems when you burned the Florida planes, but...."

"But you don't have all the vectors, José!" said Susan, looking at him intently. "Cuba is to serve as an excuse for a destabilization strike from the U.S.A. That is all I can say on electronics, but it is true. We are in deadly danger, José."

The little Cuban wiped his forehead and patted his thin hair. "And so...." he almost whispered.

"Prime Minister O'Malley has agreed to invite Fidel to Abaco, to watch our defense against the Florida navy. We can talk about it all, José: the cycle, the Israelis, the energy ... it can be worked out, José!" God, she was sweating in this cold room! She took more deep breaths.

Major Martino nodded. "Hold the channel, Susan. I will ring Fidel. We have been approached...." He paused and thought a moment. "Hold the channel!" and the screen went bright and empty.

There seemed to be nothing much to do at that point but have supper, and most of them straggled down to the wind engineers' dining room, one flight below. Ravetz and O'Malley disappeared to some private place, while Colonel Gillam and some of his young staff and engineers ate in a quiet, closed group.

Susan sat down at a table alone with her tray and picked at the fried chicken. She sighed and rubbed her eyes.

"Cheer up, cheer up," said Frank Albury, putting his tray down across from her. "Moses never stepped on the soil of the Promised Land, but he knew his people would, Susan." His soft eyes peered into her shadowed, pinched face.

"Oh, Frank." She gave a deep, shuddery sigh. "This morning before you came I was sitting in a dirty dressing gown feeling sorry for myself. Now suddenly I'm telling everyone how to run the world. These are your islands,

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your technology, your weapons, and in a few hours I've.... Oh, Hell, Frank, of course Jerry doesn't want to put Israelis into Cuba, to deal with all that political hassle on top of the whole Shastri and technical thing. And Prime Minister O'Malley, after eight years of stiff-arming Fidel, suddenly has to face him under the worst kinds of pressures and dangers, no agenda, no plans, no data."

She rubbed her cheeks hard. "And Colonel Gillam. The miracle worker, the one man in the world who translated a lot of theoretical, academic hokum into a pure Shastri defense. And by carping and needling him, I've reduced his miracle to crud. He's better, more honest than I am, Frank. He always knew what was right and what needed doing, and he did it with his super toys and his wonder children ... and, oh, Frank. The children. I can't make them fit. I just can't!" And she wiped her eyes on her napkin and stared at her plate.

Frank Albury rubbed his pink knees and cleared his throat several times. "I'm not sure I can make them fit either, Susan," he said finally. "But David was a young boy. God needed David, not only to kill an enemy of his people, but to teach a lesson, to men, to us."

Susan nodded. "Oh, I know that. I've thought about that. David is very much a Shastrian figure. The small, confident expert facing macho bluster and baloney."

Frank nodded hard. "Susan, the Shastrian society is, at its base, a meritocracy structured to continuously maximize diversity, to maximize the ways in which merit can be achieved. To use adults for tracking aircraft when the children test better would simply admit they were less than full members of the Abaco community.

"Yes, Frank. It's all true, I see it now. But to kill so easily, like a contest or game. To kill with such glee. What if it hardens them, turns them callous, Frank?"

Albury nodded. "And if those troops were to land tonight and rape Dawn LaVere," Frank colored a bit thinking about that, "would she be less hard afterwards because she hadn't killed any of them? Or wouldn't she be both hard and a victim besides?"

A young man dashed up to their table. "Frank! We've got Castro on the wire! I've sent for the Prime Minister!"

Frank rose at once. "Coming Susan?"

Susan shook her head. "I've meddled enough, Frank. Either Dr. O'Malley sells it or he doesn't, and all I could do is watch and fidgit. Frank?"

He nodded looking down at her. "I know you pray for us all the time and I don't believe a word of it, but ... don't stop, OK?"

At almost ten that night, three huge Cuban VTOLs settled down out of the dark to crouch on their tails at the

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Marsh Harbor airport, their jet-prop engines whining shrilly. Susan and Ravetz stood in the floodlit landing area, in front of two dozen Abaco civil police who held back a mass of gaping Marsh Harbor residents, come to catch a glimpse of the terrible old man.

"It's like the three-shell game," said Ravetz. "You never know which one he's in until they open the doors."

But only in the first, upthrust fuselage did a door slide back and steps swing down, and Susan saw Major Martino start down the ladder. In that instant, Frank Albury was at their elbow. "Susan! Jerry! We got it off the diplomatic wire ninety seconds ago, and now its coming over the commercial channels! President Childers has been assassinated! His helicopter was attacked by some kind of missiles, wire-guided or heat-seekers, they don't know which yet, just after he took off from the White House!"

"Oh, my God, Jerry," breathed Susan and she began to shiver. "I've never been so scared, never!"

"Look!" said Ravetz tensely. "They've just gotten the news too!" Major Martino had been followed down the ladder by the old man himself, white-bearded and wearing an O.D. baseball cap, but then two more Cubans ran down the steps shouting and all four clustered at the bottom of the ladder.

"Jerry," said Susan suddenly. "They mustn't go back! Not now!" And she ran across the asphalt waving and shouting, "José! José!"

The dapper thin Cuban turned and watched her come up. "Ah, Susan, how fine...."

"José! You've heard about Childers? Do you see now how it's happening? José, the cycle will diverge. We must all talk!" The shadowy figure behind Major Martino stepped up beside him and Susan suddenly gulped. Close up, Fidel Castro looked like an aging Ernest Hemingway, the same round beard and shape of face. She blinked and shook her head. "Dr. Castro! Within an hour, Vice-president Demarest will be sworn in. He is mad, sir! A manic-depressive who can barely be stabilized on lithium!"

The old Cuban looked at her coolly. "Dr. Peabody, José has told me about you and your call this afternoon. But, sane or mad, what is that to us?"

Susan pushed a strand of hair back. "Dr. Castro, have you ever heard of the Last Mile Study?" The old man shook his head. "Sir, the study was kept very secret because of its monstrous conclusions, but basically, Last Mile proved a number of things, all based of course on defective, single-vector analysis. First, they showed that the U.S. total-war capacity could only slip, was slipping, with time in relation to Russia and the Third World. Second, they claimed that in any all-out nuclear war, and especially a rapidly opening one, the Russians would be revealed as far weaker than believed.

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Third, that the longer the war continued, the greater would be the U.S. relative strength at the end." She paused and swallowed to moisten her dry throat. "The ... the loss of life in Asia would be ... beneficial, reducing the population pressure and breaking down super states like India that have become ungovernable. Even in the U.S., the tremendous damage and horror would turn people to the federal government for help, give it back its old clout...." She shook her head angrily. "Oh ... I won't give you any more of that horrible nonsense, Dr. Castro. It's just that President-designate Demarest believes it all, and all his advisors are ready to try it out if they can just get the first one to go off! Cuba, then the Soviets is their sequence."

Major Martino turned to the old Cuban excitedly. "Fidel, that is why they offered ..." but the old man's narrow and snapping eyes stopped Martino instantly.

"Dr. Peabody," he said, "you urged this meeting tonight to insure that these people could not possibly connect me with this invasion?" Susan nodded. "But that was before this murder. Cannot Demarest do whatever he chooses? To Cuba or anyone else?"

Susan shook her head vehemently. "There has to be a context, Dr. Castro. A logical development. Don't you see that to even get the lowest commander to fire his own missile involves a whole mass of intangibles. What sergeant, no matter how plausible the codes and signals, would fire his missile when he's watching a Lucy rerun on Miami television with no sign of war or sense of trouble?"

Castro pulled his white whiskers and looked at Major Martino. "José?" he asked softly.

Martino nodded. "She is right, Fidel! Now we see many things that we did not see before. We must at once null the political vector between the Bahamas and Cuba. We will force this man Demarest to look elsewhere for his provocations."

"Oh," said Susan, taking long breaths in sudden relief and really smiling at the two men, "I expect Demarest will be dealt with almost immediately, providing our friends here in Abaco can carry out their part tonight."

Castro, Ravetz and O'Malley left the airport in a staff car and went into private sessions for an hour, when suddenly all arrived back in the window-room center of the Wind Commune building. It was almost midnight when Frank Albury said, "Hold it everybody," and the big screen slid down. "Here's Channel Two."

The inside of the newsroom behind an open-shirted young black at his desk looked, for once, authentically busy. "Continuing Channel Two's coverage of the incredible Abaco and assassination stories," he said excitedly, "we have learned that Prime Minister Fidel Castro, Cuba's aging patriarch, has made a sensational visit to the Is-

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land of Abaco, scene this noon of an air battle involving renegades of the Florida Air National Guard and elements of the Abacoan defense forces. Cuban Radio announced that the prime minister wished to demonstrate his solidarity with other island nations who, Dr. Castro was quoted as saying, must now contend with the fall and death throes of the entire Yankee elephant rather than just the tramplings of his large and careless feet, unquote. Channel Two has also learned that the extraordinarily effective Abacoan anti-aircraft defense, which registered a sensational one-hundred percent kill against the Guard jets, was not a laser weapon as first thought but a solar mirror concentration system that can be rapidly tracked. Channel Two also...."

The breathless disclosures continued, but the old, white-bearded Cuban sat quietly down next to Susan and whispered, "That was what you wanted, was it not, Dr. Peabody?"

Susan nodded. "Thank you, Dr. Castro, and ... sir?" He looked at her and nodded. "Shastrian ideas can work in Cuba. I...." But he only smiled distantly and held up his hand.

"I know all about that from José, Dr. Peabody. We will see how it all works out."

They continued watching the developing stories on the Miami channels when Ravetz suddenly spoke. "Hush, let's catch this!"

"We have learned," said a frazzled young lady staring down blearily at the prompter readout in front of her, "that Israeli Ambassador Mishka Gur is attempting to see the new president in his Camp David retreat. Sources at the Israeli embassy say that Ambassador Gur is attempting an eleventh-hour appeal to stop the continued Florida-based attacks on the Jewish settlements in the Abaco Island group. Sources at Camp David have refused to comment on the appeal and say that President Demarest is in seclusion with his closest advisors."

"What's that all about, Jerry?" asked Susan, suddenly puzzled, but Ravetz, his face grim, only shook his head. "Johnnie," he said turning to Colonel Gillam, "we can't win too big tonight. There's no limit on this one!"

Gillam laughed bitterly. "I thought absolute victories were a Shastri-no-no, Jerry?"

Susan spoke up. "This noon that was true, Colonel, but not now, not with the fleet. The cycle may be damped, but Demarest is still as dangerous as a mad dog. Nothing will help his enemies more than total victory here." Gillam said nothing and Susan noticed that Castro was watching them with quick narrow eyes.

Suddenly, they all turned to stare at the lighted C.B. monitor board. "Attention! Attention, Abaco, this is your Argus North. Our pirates have increased their speed to twenty knots. E.T.A. Man-o-War, entrance-channel buoy, fourteen minutes."

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Colonel Gillam jumped up and peered out the north windows. The moon was less than a quarter full and the Sea of Abaco was dark, only an occasional navigation marker winking or glowing along the five-mile channel leading in from Man-o-War to Marsh Harbor. "Infrared, Frank," said Gillam.

The big screen lit with a faint eerie light and in the center was a detailed whitish image of a destroyer escort bow on, with a black bone in her teeth. "She has a missile battery admidships, Jerry," said Colonel Gillam softly. "We mustn't provoke her as long as she...." He lifted up the mike. "Man-o-War Traffic Master. This is Big John. Prepare for lamp messages. Send at the DE, the leading vessel."

"Ten-four, Big John. We're waiting."

They were all waiting now. Everyone frozen in the room, watching the infrared, magnified images of the incoming ships. "They're pretty well bunched, Colonel," said a young Abacoan operating the search radar. "Except for the last one. He's hanging back."

"He won't come," said Susan suddenly. "That must be their communications center. They wouldn't want to lose their main radio contact with Florida."

"Imagine," said Ravetz in wonder. "Just plowing in here like that. Of course they have acoustic front-scanning so they can see the channel is clear, but after what happened this noon, it just...."

The DE was heading directly for the lighted entrance markers at twenty knots. Colonel Gillam picked up the mike. "Traffic Master, this is Big John. Send in plain English the following: Welcome, please identify yourself. Repeat it over and over. Execute."

"Will do, Big John. Commencing message: Welcome, please identify yourself."

A signal lamp flickered at the north end of Elbow Cay, although they could only see it at Marsh Harbor on a video picture of the entrance area. Immediately the DE began signaling rapidly back from its bridge toward Man-o-War.

"Big John, this is Traffic Master. We are getting return signal lamp traffic as follows: The Abaco Independence Movement reiterates its solidarity with its ... oppressed black brothers of the Abacos ... we emphasize our peaceful intentions to all...." Colonel Gillam pressed the priority button and silenced Traffic Master.

"Thank you, Traffic Master. Continue sending our message without change. Crawdaddy North?"

A new voice of a young woman came out of the monitor. "This is Crawdaddy North, Big John. We see your targets."

"Crawdaddy North. Is Harmon tracking?"

"Positive, Big John. Harmon is accepting targets."

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The great Sea of Abaco, stretching forty miles north and ten south of Marsh Harbor lay in faint moonlight. The small cay towns of Man-o-War and Hopetown were completely black, as was all of Marsh Harbor. Susan peered out of the dark room at the dark water, and far across the flat sea she suddenly had a sense of motion, of activity.

"He's entering the channel now," whispered Gillam. "Here they all come. Crawdaddy North, do we have a wave simulation yet?"

"Hang on, Big John. Here is Harmon's proposed wave now. This is a thirty-x projection."

The big screen suddenly lit up with an outline map of the Sea of Abaco from Treasure Cay south to Cherokee Point. A thin green line starting at Treasure Cay moved south across the image, shifting in shape and thickness until it reached the Marsh Harbor area, where small green ship targets were also moving more slowly in an irregular line. As the green line passed across the ship pips, they winked out, one after another, and the green line continued past Marsh Harbor and disappeared.

Gillam watched the simulation scan closely. "Crawdaddy North. How soon until decision-zero time?"

"Harmon says four minutes, Big John."

"Crawdaddy, I don't like the north end of the wave. See if Harmon can truncate it."

"Will do, Big John.... Stand by, here comes Harmon's new try."

This time the green line did not overlap Man-o-War at all, but passed directly centered over the line of ships. "Crawdaddy North. This is Big John. I like that simulation. Put Harmon in real time and turn him loose."

"Will do, Big John. Harmon has control ... now!"

Susan turned to Ravetz in puzzlement. "Who is Harmon, Jerry?"

"The hydrodynamic computer," said Ravetz with a grin. "The only self-adjusting, boundary-condition simulator in the world. But Harmon isn't just a thinker. When he gives us what we want, then we let him go ahead and do it."

Susan looked at Ravetz and then at Gillam. "You're going to pull the plug on them, aren't you Jerry? Empty out the bathtub?"

Ravetz grinned again. "We couldn't keep you guessing very long on this one, Susan."

"Big John, this is Crawdaddy North. Harmon is dumping now."

Gillam peered and peered into the night.

"This is Crawdaddy North. The basin is down five feet, and the sinkage is accelerating."

"That DE should touch anytime now," said Gillam tensely to himself.

Susan looked down from the considerable height of the Wind Commune building and gasped. The land beneath her had suddenly increased. The re-

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vealed sand and coral bottom stretched out away from the shore and into the night, no water in sight anywhere. "But, Jerry," she asked, "how do you get it to come back as a wave instead of just rising and floating them again?"

From way across the water there was a sudden, grinding, crashing sound. Ravetz cocked his head. "The DE wouldn't float again anyway. She's just ripped her bottom out hitting at twenty knots." He pointed to the projected map of the Sea of Abaco. "We pump down the tidal impoundment basin north of Treasure Cay, which is also dredged deeper for load-equalization on very low tides. The water surges into it when the gates are opened by Harmon, gaining velocity so that when it strikes the north end of the basin it builds into a south-moving wave. It isn't a wave really, but a bore, like in the Bay of Fundy, maybe twenty-five or thirty feet high."

Fidel Castro, one liver-spotted hand rubbing his thin white hair, pointed to the screen. "And this, Professor Ravetz, is also a Shastrian weapon. Useful, community integrated, all the other things you have told us about?"

Ravetz nodded. "Quite practical really. With the entire Bight of Abaco, our backside, turned into a solar pond for the thermocline system, approach to our mainland really has to come across the Sea of Abaco."

"But amphibious vehicles, Professor Ravetz?" said the old man.

Jerry Ravetz smiled. "Reserve judgment on that question until our defense is ended, Dr. Castro."

"Big John, this is your Argus North. We believe all vessels numbering twenty-eight are now on the ground. We can see no movement anywhere."

"Argus North. Light up the sky!"

Immediately a series of pops sounded far to the north and the first parachutes opened sending brilliant white light flooding down from the sky above the Sea of Abaco. Ravetz leaned toward the old man and spoke softly. "We're using the Swedish day-night battlefield system, Dr. Castro. The pyrotechnic projectors are programmed to provide a continuous, shadowless carpet of light for as long as we choose. This part of our operation requires much light."

Brighter and brighter still glowed the once-green Sea of Abaco, but now without its water. Out as far as the eye could see were pools and puddles, but no continuous sea at all. And to the north, in its dry center, were the distant ships, an irregular line of beached and heeled craft of all sizes. And in under the high ceiling of flare lights that continued to fly up popping and bursting came three big Bahamian army helicopters. Susan could readily make out what the massively amplified voice said, over and over, booming downward on the little ragged line of doomed ships. "Put on your life jackets. A tidal wave is coming. Do not

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stay below. Put on...."

Susan gave a sidelong glance at the old Cuban Prime Minister. His mouth was open. He was thunderstruck, transfixed by the scene. This was going to work out. Oh, dear God, this was going to work out!

And now Colonel Gillam turned on the room. "We must have absolute quiet now! Please, all of you!" He picked up the mike. "Crawdaddy South, this is Big John. Is Harmon working on Wave Two?"

"All right, Johnnie. He's working but we've hardly assessed Wave One." It was an ancient, cracked, crotchety voice, a voice Susan knew belonged to eighty-six-year-old Professor Stephen Morheim, of N.Y.U. and the Trondheim Institute for Hydrodynamic Research, long retired to Abaco where he taught physics and calculus to the freshmen of Abaco Technical from a wheel chair.

Gillam leaned forward, tense, his voice low. "Crawdaddy South, we have only three point seven minutes until decision zero on Wave Two."

"Harmon knows that, Johnnie. He's working out the best initial condition within the solution-time restraint. Now you just lay back and...." The irritable old voice trailed off and they heard him muttering to himself near the open mike. "Harmon, let's depth-average and get Johnnie something before he craps his pants. Forget those higher terms, Harmon.... All right, Johnnie," the voice got suddenly louder again. "Here's your projection. Fifty-x, since you're in such a raving hurry."

The screen still showed the southern part of the Sea of Abaco, and again they saw a green line projected on the map moving southeast toward Marsh Harbor from Treasure Cay, and as it moved south a second line of green detatched itself from the Little Harbor Impoundment and moved north. The two lines came together between Hopetown and Marsh Harbor, and a third, fainter and more irregular line moved northeast over Johnnies Cay and into the Atlantic. But the original line, now very faint and tenuous, continued southeast to Elbow Cay. "This is Big John. Crawdaddy South, that was a simulated seven-foot runup on Elbow!"

"I know it and Harmon knows it. He's correcting, aren't you Harmon? Let's delay opening on the west end, Harmon, and phase shift the stream function...."

Susan leaned close to Ravetz and whispered in his ear. "Does he really ... talk to Harmon, Jerry?"

Ravetz turned and whispered back. "He claims he does but John thinks it's just his way of thinking, of organizing himself."

"Here comes a better one for you," came the creaky voice. This time there was no discernible wave hitting Elbow, the entire result of the collision running northeast out over Johnnies Cay.

"Crawdaddy South. That was per-

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fect! Put Harmon on line, we've only thirty-six seconds!"

"Don't get so danged rushed, Johnnie. Harmon wants to bifurcate the outrun and keep the blockhouse dry. Now you give the boy his chance...."

Gillam suddenly turned and thrust his fingers through his kinky hair. "Jesus, God, Jerry. What...?"

"Here's the wave, Johnny." And this time the green resultant line actually dimmed in the center as it reached Johnnies Cay and left the basin in two strong surges.

Gillam dropped his hands to his sides. "Oh, Hell. They're actually going to do it!"

"Seven seconds, Johnnie, and I'm putting Harmon on line. Three seconds. Gates are opening. This is Crawdaddy South, Johnnie. Your Wave Two is off and moving!" And the old voice was firm and filled with powerful satisfaction.

Castro leaned towards Ravetz. "The second wave is to prevent the first one from doing damage within the sea, Professor Ravetz?"

Ravetz nodded. "The basin turns south at Marsh Harbor. So we have to modify the first bore by cue-balling a second one into it. The control station on Johnnies Cay is designed to go completely under water, but apparently old Prof Morheim and Harmon have the resultant bore splitting and going out on either side. Well, we'll see...."

But Susan now gave a great gasp, for the northern bore was in sight! A great steaming, thundering white wall of water, it stretched almost from one side of the Sea of Abaco to the other, over three miles of blinding foam running like an express train. And it was growing in size rapidly. "It's doing about thirty-eight miles an hour," said Ravetz to the awe-struck old Cuban.

John Gillam stared hungrily at the great bore. "Optical blow on the crest, Frank."

The big screen immediately showed a magnified and vastly foreshortened image of the crest. And riding back and forth along it were great insects, black and stalky in the intense light of the battlefield flare carpet.

"The Donnie-Rockets!" breathed Susan.

"Yes," said Ravetz. "Riding the bore to the ships to help pick up survivors. Saving these crews is the biggest systems problem of all, over twenty-five hundred people in the drink at once."

Marv Weinstein, the Admiral of the Abaco Sea, shouted into his C.B. excitedly. "Gerald Beans, Captain Beans! Get back off that crest! You'll skid to the bottom!"

"We riding just great, Marv!" came the high ecstatic voice of Gerald Beans. "Oh my, Johnnie, we Israelites are coming with the Hammer of God!"

"Here's the picture from Gerald's boat," said Frank Albury, and now the big screen showed a blinding color view down the sloping, white, boiling front of the wave to the sea floor.

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There was no sense of forward progress, just the violent motion, pitching and rolling. The huge, smoking, ever-changing face of the bore fell away in front like a living, steaming sand dune, and as Susan watched, totally transfixed, the first ships came into view, distantly at the top of the screen, small and leaning in hurt attitudes. Now she turned and looked out the window and saw the great white monster itself, gigantic in the brilliant flat light and moving with implacable, terrifying speed. Now, back on the screen was the bore's face and the DE growing suddenly huge beneath them and.... The bore devoured it! Ate it completely in a second! Susan, shocked, looked again out the window and saw the monstrous, shuffling white confusion of the bore face vanish each ship in turn with no more effort than if they were seed pods or bits of drift wood.

"How Biblical, Jerry!" said Susan gaping. "You've outdone yourself!"

Ravetz shook his head. "This is completely Colonel Gillam's show. Once he grasped the idea of the Shastri null-weapon, he turned this one up. I never believed it would work. I still don't believe it will work!"

The great white bore swept, roaring, past them, the Donnie-Rockets falling back off the crest now to the sea behind that filled the basin from shore to shore with confusion, surge and chop.

But Captain Beans' picture still showed the gleaming lumpy sheet of the face and, now, something in the right corner of the screen! Wave Two!

Marv urgently spoke. "Lay back, Gerald, lay back! We want the picture, not you *in* the picture!"

"Oh, Johnnie, Marv, I hate to leave her. She's such a beauty! But there comes old man Number Two! Don't he look mean, ole man Two!"

The last Donnie-Rocket fell back off the crest and let it roll ahead towards its turbulent destiny at Matt Lowes Cay. The southern bore, not so high but vast enough indeed, had thundered and smoked up past Lubbers Quarters. Now it was abreast of the old striped lighthouse at Hopetown, and then.... The great meeting of the seas! A tumult in the basin, an endless roar, spume hundreds of feet high! On Gerald's video they saw the boil and literal explosion of waters in breathtaking close-up, but through the east window a grander sight still, for the entire sweep of the horizon was suddenly intruded on, fragmented by a volcano of white waters, tumultuous and blinding under the flare carpet.

Susan felt suddenly dizzy. Is there nothing we cannot try? An ecstasy in the sea itself!

"This is Crawdaddy South, Johnnie. You want to bet ten crays that we won't wet the top of that blockhouse, eh?" The old man was cackling and breathing heavily.

John Gillam grinned, his teeth shining. "I'd rather bet that the sun wouldn't rise tomorrow, you old...."

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"Well, Johnnie, there goes the runoff. You just watch!" came the dry crackly voice.

And sure enough, the Donnie-Rocket camera showed that the smaller, but still impressive runoff bore did bifurcate, quite magically in fact, and roll by on each side of the Johnnies Cay blockhouse, and although some spray may have touched the roof, no green water did.

The ancient voice really cackled in satisfaction now. "Thought we couldn't optimize in four minutes, eh, Harmon? Why Johnnie was pissing his diapers when I was jumping Navier-Stokes through hoops...."

But now the space north and west of them was blackly spattered with heads, and more were popping up every second. The Donnie-Rockets ran slowly into the thickest bunches, and Abaco police and troopers in bathing suits pulled the men aboard with desperate haste.

Fidel Castro, his face white with astonishment and shock under his white beard, suddenly turned to Major Martino. "José, how many guard machines do we have around Abaco?"

Martino looked surprised. "Why, eight, Fidel."

"Colonel Gillam, if we could help, we have eight sea-surface, rotor machines available to you. They might perhaps come down into the larger groups and hold men until the more mobile...."

"We accept, Dr. Castro," said Gillam quickly. "This was always the biggest problem. We simply don't have the capacity to do this fast enough."

As Major Martino and Frank Albury contacted the Cuban machines, Susan watched close-ups on several small screens of the moment-by-moment rescues. The scuba teams were down on the wrecks attempting to free those caught below in that precious moment before the sea water irreovcably damaged their lungs.

Now the first of the big Cuban guard machines settled ponderously into an area black with heads. Frank brought the scene into sharp optical close-up, and they saw the first Cuban in white coveralls leap down a ladder onto the huge float and rip his clothing off in a single gesture, diving smoothly into the sea. His target was a head and hand slipping back into the emerald-green waves.

"He got him!" breathed Ravetz. But now more Cubans were in the water, and still others were rigging nets and ropes for the men in the water to grasp. As the next two Cuban machines settled down into the light, their floats were already crowded with brown lean bodies that dove from great heights at struggling figures beneath.

Colonel Gillam turned and looked straight at Fidel Castro. "These men are a credit to your nation, Dr. Castro. Their flexibility is superb!"

The old man nodded, his color al-

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most returned. "Oh, we have learned some things from your Shastri and from José, Colonel." The old man looked again out the window. "But we have still more things to learn, José, do we not?"

"Si, Fidel, si," said Major Martino soberly, but Susan saw his face was now alight with joy.

The continual rescue and transportation of the prisoners to shore occupied every eye, and Susan turned tiredly to Mary Albury. "Oh, Mary, I'll never get back to Hopetown tonight," she said in a soft whisper. "Is there any place I can lay my head?"

Mary smiled, "Sure, honey, the night-duty weather watch bedrooms on the roof. C'mon, I'll take you up. They don't use them much."

They climbed to the roof and found a cozy, breezy bedroom that overlooked the far-flung rescues still going on to the northeast. Susan sat down on the firm bed, looking out at the brilliant light, and hearing the distant excited sounds. Mary Albury looked down at her. "We're part of history now, aren't we Susan? Really part?"

Susan nodded drowsily. "Oh dear, yes, I really think we are, Mary." And kicking off her shoes she rolled over and fell into a dreamless sleep.

At quarter to nine the next morning, they all reassembled in the window room of the Wind Commune building. Dr. O'Malley, who had watched the night's events from a Bahamian naval vessel, was already seated, as was Fidel Castro and Major Martino. Susan picked a chair as unobtrusively far back as she could and leaned over to Frank Albury at one of his panels. "How did it all come out, Frank?"

He beamed at her. "Over ninety-eight percent saved, Susan. You know, we never got better than about ninety-two percent in the simulations. Having the Cubans really made the difference. That's the answer, put as many swimmers in the water as you can."

"You mean ... the next time you do it, Frank?" asked Susan seriously. Frank Albury giggled, then laughed out loud.

"Well," said Jerry Ravetz, "I'm afraid we're not quite out of the woods yet. That 'we' means humanity in general, not just Abaco. President Demarest is to address the nation at nine a.m. We've done all that could possibly be done on Abaco, and with the help of our Cuban friends." Jerry nodded at Castro. "But now the final act is elsewhere. To put this quite quickly, we are expecting Demarest to resign the office of President this morning, although not ... ah, before certain unconditional pardons have occurred, I suspect."

Susan could not resist leaning forward. "Jerry," she said quickly, "what if he won't do it?"

Ravetz shrugged. "He must do it, Susan. Munoz has fled to Nicaragua where his kind can plot endlessly. Demarest's part in this is hours from

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exposure. And last night was a total disaster for him."

"But he is mad, Jerry!"

"Channel Seven looks good," said Frank suddenly, and they all stared as the big screen descended and flashed the image of the seal on the rostrum. From offstage came the heavy, stagy voice: "...the President of the United States."

"All my fellow citizens...." Susan looked up at the jowly, age-sagged face, newly ruined by defeat and fear. But the eyes were bright, alive, darting about.

"Jerry, he's mad as a hatter. Look at the eyes!" said Susan quickly.

"Hush," said Ravetz. "Hush!"

"I bring you a brief, sad message, my fellow citizens...." His eyes were darting even more, peering every which way, the hands fluttering, the cheek muscles jerking. "Last night a group of brave young Americans were brutally murdered by a cowardly, dirty kike trick...." The screen briefly blurred for several seconds. Then the image skipped and steadied. "But I must now announce to you all, my beloved friends and supporters, that my health will not permit me to continue ...."

"That's an electronic dummy, a piece-up!" hissed Frank Albury. Fidel Castro looked at Frank.

"What is a 'piece-up,' Mr. Albury?"

"Taking snips of video tape with separate words, facial expressions, and gestures and building a completely spurious TV appearance electronically. It's easy to spot if you know the tricks."

"Turn it off, Frank," said Ravetz quietly.

"Off?"

Ravetz nodded and the screen retracted. "All right," he said, and took a deep breath. "President Demarest is dead. Whatever I say here, I'll deny absolutely I ever said ... and I won't say it again. Is that clear?" He looked around the room. "When Demarest became Vice-president or as he was becoming, a person joined his group who gained Demarest's complete trust. That person, who will soon be identified with an extremist U.S. Jewish group ... and you just had a scrap of Demarest on Jews ... was given a radiation weapon, a no-blast neutron generator. This morning, Demarest was visited by Israeli Ambassador Gur and told that if he did not quit, his part in the Abaco activities would be revealed and the death of these sailors placed on his head." Ravetz paused, then ... "I'm guessing on some of this, but it must have happened something like this. Demarest balked, so Ambassador Gur played his final ace. If the President did not announce his resignation within the hour, he would be killed, and if he attempted to leave Camp David, he would be killed. Demarest agreed, but he is mad, as you said Susan, and they were waiting for him with the taped piece-up ready. When that 'kike' popped out, they knew there was only one

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way to end it safely and they pushed the button."

"And the rest of those at Camp David?" asked Castro quickly.

Ravetz shook his head. "Gone, of course. Sacrificed. Ambassador Gur, other good and brave men, some evil men, some innocent men."

The room was still until Frank leaned forward and said quickly. "It's true. They can't raise Camp David. Phones, TV. Everything's out there!"

Susan raised her hand diffidently. "Jerry, could I say one more thing?"

Ravetz shook his head and grinned. "Susan, you've never stopped talking since you got here, and thank God for that!"

"Well," she said looking around at them. "Dr. Castro, Dr. O'Malley, the rest of you, it's just this. The person who damped this Shastri cycle was Colonel John Gillam and no one else. If Munoz had gotten his way here, none of the rest of this would have happened. This was an epic, an historic defense, not only of Abaco and the Bahama Islands, but of Shastrian ideals as well!"

"Here! Here!" said Frank Albury loudly, and they all stood and clapped, turning toward Colonel Gillam.

Fidel Castro nodded vigorously. "Dr. Peabody, I will second that. Colonel Gillam, the matchless professionalism, planning, and discipline of your action is eclipsed only by the skill and élan of your men." The old man looked around excitedly. "Shastrian ideals can adapt Communism to the new, to the technical present. The sun shines forever, Professor Ravetz! And Cuba too shall have fourteen-year-old men who drive great foil boats to the very rim of the maelstrom!"

So, in the end, it was black, skinny Captain Gerald Beans of Dundas Town who would change the Caribbean and perhaps the world. Susan stared, transfixed, as the excited old man, his white beard spiky and erect, now not only looking like Hemingway, but talking that same romantic wild stuff about élan and style. Oh, how Shastri would have laughed at that!

Major Martino leaned over and whispered in Susan's ear. "We will make the step, Susan. Someday they will light candles to you in Cuba!"

But Susan looked down at her brown knees and blinked and blinked.

"Oh, José. Oh, I hope not, José," she whispered back.

The Cuban VTOLs took off at noon while all of Abaco buzzed, and met, and organized the victory celebration that night. After some excited C.B. traffic, Elbow Cay was selected as the site, since it had been in the thick of the air battle and stood the greatest risk of run-up during the use of the hydrodynamic weapon. Colored lights were strung in the small revival park and a parade, of sorts, organized before the crayfish barbecue.

The parade never actually ended but gradually metamorphosed into a

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kind of combination conga line and boogaloo that stretched the length of Hopetown and kept busy every instrument and player in the entire chain of islands.

At the head of the great writhing chain of Abacoans and Israelis, or really in the middle since the head and tail had long since merged, was that ace of aces, Dawn LaVere. Dancing nearby, Susan noticed, was Prime Minister O'Malley, his eyes popping as Dawn's long thighs and tiny ripped jeans shorts flashed like bonefish in the warm fitful light. The extraordinary tightness and brevity of those shorts suggested that they might not come off at all, a possibility Susan smilingly rejected.

She leaned against the fence at the rear of the field where the dancers dropped off momentarily to get food and drink. She was now without the drug and in full possession of the inevitable downer. Her moment, the greatest moment of her life, had just passed, but she had made no more friends, nor was she any more a part of this blooming Shastrian society than she had been yesterday morning.

Susan looked at the gyrating, grinning throng and listened to the blaring music. She sighed and rubbed her eyes and tried to tell herself, as Frank surely would have, that peacemakers were especially blessed. That didn't seem to offer much to a lonely, overeducated, out-of-place woman in her forties, playing a brief, impromptu role in some larger....

"Dr. Peabody?" She looked up startled and saw Colonel Gillam, now neatly dressed in Bermuda shorts and a flowered sports shirt, standing before her. "I wanted to thank you for the speech this morning. We ... ah...:" he rubbed his shiny black face with a big pink palm. "We both wanted the same things, Dr. Peabody."

Susan sighed deeply. "Yes, we did, and we do, Colonel." She looked up at the shadowed angular face, the high cheeks gleaming in the dim light, the brown eyes large and soft. If you judged a man by his friends — Dawn LaVere, Proefssor Morheim, Gerald Beans — John Gillam rated tops.

Susan threw her head back and bit her lip. "Colonel, John ... would you like to try some political cocaine with me?" She looked openly into his face.

He rubbed his chin slowly. "Well, uh ... Dr. ... Susan." He smoothed back his kinky short hair several times. "Ah, well look, frankly, you scare the Hell out of me. I'm afraid I'd be sort of like a scout master trying to keep up with Mata Hari."

Two bright tears popped into Susan's eyes and she made no attempt to wipe them away. "Oh? Well, I guess I really asked for that, John. We Peabodys aren't used to.... Well, look, just forget I said it." And she stared at his face made blurry with the tears.

John Gillam took her hand and smiled, his big lips just parting to show the bright teeth. "I've had my great victories, Susan. I guess I can stand a de-

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feat," and she unashamedly gripped his hand in gratitude for that.

They walked north from Hopetown, hand-in-hand, leaving the shouts, the happy laughter, and the tinkling music behind. As they paused at her front door and kissed for the first time, the fitful east wind drove the ridge-mounted wind rotors behind them at subtly different speeds and the air throbbed faintly with the beat frequencies. "Shastri's heartbeat, John," she said softly. But now she saw his eyes were holding her and that they had gone muzzy and soft as his desire for her mounted.

John Gillam suffered no defeat that night. The great subjective time suspension possible with the drug not only drove him to the peak of sensation but held him in a timeless spasm out of which he perceived another Susan, her body in a tight, upward circle of ecstasy, her face rigid yet smooth and lost as a child's. The softness of her arms and her gentle breasts caught John Gillam in a spiraling rush of tender lust. "Oh, how lovely," he breathed again and again. "Oh, Susan," and it seemed impossible that the relief, and yet not-relief could last so blissfully long.

But Susan was riding a hard, upward-curving wave of white passion, a wave that would never break, or else break and break again forever. Her body lusted for John Gillam's strong core, and when she saw his black face, now soft and heavy with desire, her own lust flamed higher. In that wrenching, protracted moment, she remembered her father, the fairy tales, how they lived happily for ever after, and she knew that John Gillam and she would live *within this moment* for ever after, and that was better.

And in her final overwhelming submission to utter pleasure, Susan cried out, "Oh, Johnnie! Mine's on fire! Mine's burning too!"

When those words were spoken, the Battle of the Abaco Reefs came, as far as any such battle can, to an end. It was not the last battle in the history of the West, but it was one of the most decisive. And as Susan had sensed that night, she and John Gillam did live together within that moment, through the rest of their long and useful lives.

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Books

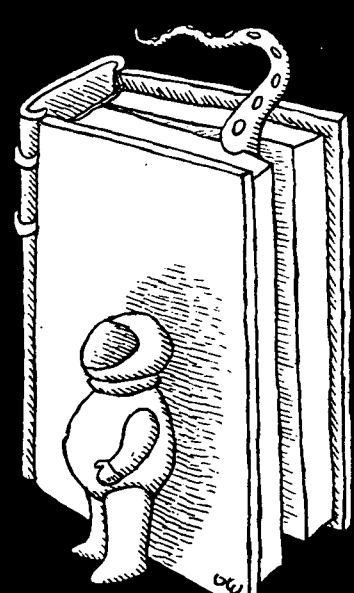
JOANNA RUSS

Immortal: Short Novels of the Transhuman Future, ed. Jack Dann, Harper & Row, New York, $9.95

Anticipations: Eight New Stories, ed. Christopher Priest, Scribner's, New York, $8.95

Ursula K. LeGuin's Science Fiction Writing Workshop: The Altered I, ed. Lee Harding, Berkley, New York, $3.95

A Place Beyond Man, Cary Neeper, Dell, New York, $1.50



Immortality — like death — is one of the great unrealizables, powerful in artists' hands not because they are capable of saying anything about it, but because they can use it to say so much about everything else. Probably the only interesting use of the subject can be made by the religious mystics, since they use immortality as a metaphor for transcendence; thus in science fiction we have Shaw's "Ancients" (experienced, serious, memory-reliant, detached from the body) and Stapledon's "Last Men" (playful, wild, physical, paradoxical, immediate, sensuous). Without the mysticism and hence the belief in progress-as-transcendence, extrapolating from old age results not in Shaw's wonderful Ancients but in Swift's horrible Struldbrugs, while the neoteny of the Last Men decays to silly hedonism: the immortal as game-player.

In *Immortal* editor Dann has assembled four novellas in which immortality (conceived differently by each

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author) is neither transcendent nor particularly appealing — therefore making R. C. W. Ettinger's technophile introduction look even odder than it is. Ettinger says that human nature is radically imperfect and should be improved, but if so, are not the improvements suggested to us by the radically imperfect judgment of our radically imperfect natures also radically imperfect? Ettinger thinks not, nor does he answer the question of *who* the "we" is who will judge what constitutes improvement (Gene Wolfe's does in "The Doctor of Death Island" and the answer is a chilling one). Ettinger does agree with one of the stories; both he and George Zebrowski ("Transfigured Night") disapprove of an immortality devoted to immediate sensation in the interests of wish-fulfillment. Zebrowski tries hard to avoid the fallacy of imitative form (as one of his characters comments, without the refractoriness of reality, wish-fulfillment can get pretty dull) but he can only up the ante by luridness and violence, since the story is without real conflict. The best line in it is a visiting alien's dry comment, "I am glad that you are not mobile." There are signs also that attempting to make meaningless events matter has pushed the author into forcing the tone; there are lines like "Inertia imprisoned him in the chair as a desire to visit Evelyn seized him," and "He slowed suddenly." The quotes from Toffler, Ettinger, Blake, Dali, Feinberg, Plato, "Song," and Anonymous don't help; the material by Haldane does.

If Zebrowski's immortality is meaningless hedonism (based on a false dichotomy of "sensation" vs. "knowledge"), Wolfe's is grimly opposite — immortal, we are merely our old selves with all our old (and fatal) sins upon our heads. The world of "Doctor of Death Island" is the world of Wells' giant corporations, a story of drab and shining detail (the understatement and the texture work even better the second time round) in which long life — precarious as any, as the author makes clear — is simply another commodity to be controlled by ambition and corporate greed. As usual in Wolfe's stories, people do appalling things in the quietest way and technically the story's lovely, with simple (and terrifying) lines like "The book was near his head now." And as in much Wolfe, there is a delayed-action bang long after the last page, in this case the incidental destruction of an entire society. Yet the story is flawed by the moralism (not morality) that hangs over it like the shadow of Wolfe's giant spacecraft over the prison. The "poetic justice" of female jealousy is there (I suspect) merely because the author can't bear to let his protagonist go unpunished for a murder which is, also, not quite plausible.

Pamela Sargent, with less showiness than any of the others, gets more done; her version of immortality (the dullest: simple continuance) is inci-

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dental to a generation gap between the long-lived humans and their genetically changed, "rational" children, the children a fine mixture of the admirable and the unappealing, a balance Sargent attains by careful, realistic detail. "The Renewal" is a world in which the refractoriness of outside reality (and other people) looms large; it is, for just this reason, the most interesting tale of the lot. (The intractability of reality in "Death Island" is largely author-fabricated.) Sargent presents evasiveness, ordinariness, fear, and keeping a low profile as high-survival traits, though tragic ones. The (hermaphroditic) children are very good in their awful way, and it took me a while to notice the splendid things Sargent was doing with pronouns (they're not there and you don't miss them).

"Chanson Perpetuelle" by Thomas Disch, along with "Mutability" in *Anticipations* (and several other pieces in various science fiction magazines) is part of a forthcoming novel, *The Pressure of Time*. As an admirer, even to idolatry, of Disch's *334*, which I consider as brilliant as early Wells, I must nonetheless report that the so-far-published sections of *Time* appear to me not to be science fiction at all, but a mundane novel (in Delany's phrase, "mundus" meaning "the world") of an in-group of aging, jaded, experienced, sophisticated initiates interacting with an out-group of inexperienced, uninitiated, passionate young, the medium of action being sexual intrigue. Despite Disch's attemmpts to set the novel in the future, the science-fictional details (of the fragments published, at least) don't add up, and I include the section on a spaceship. Phrase by phrase Disch is a splendid writer, but his attempt to move a contemporary story into a (nebulous) future results, for me, in the kind of emptiness in which a writer's mannerisms become annoying, in this case the foreignisms and a Mauve Decade preciosity which were quite invisible in, say, *Camp Concentration*. I suspect that Disch's change of locale, from the United States to England and Europe, has disturbed that unfamiliarity-in-familiarity that is at the heart of science fiction. While even the most obvious details in *334*,* like the dream-slow passage of those great ships,, the *U.S.S. Melville* and the *U.S.S. Dana*, past the Battery, evoked complex social overtones, similar details in "Chanson" (like the Brighton Wall or the pudding clubs) are merely embellishments on a landscape Disch already sees as strange, and hence already science-fictional. (For the transformation of modern London into the strangeness of science fiction, one must look to Michael Moorcock's Jerry Cornelius books — he doesn't do it as well as

*If *the sections are read in the original order of publication. The "chronological" order of novel publication is aesthetically destructive. Delany recommends: "The Death of Socrates," "Emancipation," "Angoulême," "Bodies," "Everyday Life in the Later Roman Empire," and "334."*

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Disch does New York in *334* but he does it.) One of the difficulties of the science fiction is ghetto is the difficulty of getting out of it conceptually. I would like to see the mundane novel hidden under the science fiction embellishments of *The Pressure of Time;* I suspect it would be chilly, disagreeable, and impressive.

Christopher Priest's introduction to *Anticipation* falls into the same error as Disch's novel; i.e. (as Priest says) "all good science fiction hovers on the edge of being something other than science fiction." I can understand Priest's annoyance at critics' calling science fiction trash, but is it necessary to erase the mode entirely in order to be respectable? Time and again somebody in the field tries this only to come up with an indigestible cold hash of science-fiction-plus-soap-opera or the late James Blish's Smeerps (call it a "smeerp" instead of a rabbit). If trendy academics say that *1984* is too good to be science fiction (as Priest reports), it doesn't help matters to agree with them by saying that all good science fiction isn't science fiction (as Priest does). Perhaps it's the idea that science fiction ought to resemble received ideas about what "literature" is that led the editor to the first four stories in the anthology, none of which are first-rate and all of which are familiar ideas worked out in thorough, but oddly muted, detail. Robert Scheckley's "Is *That* What People Do?" is a slight fantasy; Bob Shaw's "The Amphitheatre" is a realistically-detailed (but twice-told) alien monster which ought to count for much more in the story than it does, as should the alien rescuer. Priest's own "The Negation" is pure smeerp, a fake-European allegory that could easily happen in a real country and ought to. Ian Watson's "The Very Slow Time Machine" has some nice intellectual athletics, but it sets up one of those tremendously mysterious events for which it is hard to find a plausibly tremendous explanation. Watson rings in a Messiah, which will disappoint those who remember the last line of Van Vogt's *The Weapon Shops of Isher.* Whatever blight hit the first four tales (the fear of being too vivid or lurid?) also clouds J. G. Ballard's "One Afternoon at Utah Beach," a surprisingly flat story which promises much more dislocation of reality than it finally delivers. Of Disch's "Mutability" I've already spoken.

There remain the slight, pleasant "The Greening of the Green" by Harry Harrison and the good "A Chinese Perspective" by Brian Aldiss, which backs a bit woozily into Phil Dick country — in some of its details, not in its tone, which is sprightly and optimistic.

From the other side of the world comes *Ursula K. LeGuin's Science Fiction Workshop: The Altered I.* Lee Harding, a student at the First Australian Science Fiction Writers' Workshop of 1975, has put together a potpourri

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of stories by students and teacher, introductions, comments, postludes, writing exercises, and general impressions of workshopping that together convey very well the whole process of the intensive science-fiction workshop for new writers. (There were even the grongs. As LeGuin exclaims, "That dolphin-torn, that grong-tormented sea!" There's always something. I remember one workshop in which it was breakfast cereals like Cream of Flax.) The non-fiction is excellent, although most of the fiction suffers unavoidably from its shortness and the hurried nature of its composition. There is a first- and second-draft LeGuin story plus comments between (interesting but minor for LeGuin). Of the others, Annis Shepherd's "Duplicates" is a vignette which needs more social background and explanation than it has (its complaint about the female predicament hasn't been fully converted into an objective, science-fictional situation); John Edward Clark's "Lonely Are the Only Ones" is another vignette, one of those frustrating, exciting situations for which you can't find a proper ending (he doesn't); and David Grigg's "Islands" and "Crippled Spinner," despite their nicely atmospheric treatment of the loneliness and beauty of space, are vignettes, not stories. Predictably, as with most young writers, the love stories are the worst in the book — in general, they point to a situation and shout "Look! Look!" — from John Edward Clark's inflatable doll in "Emily, My Emily" to Rob Gerrand's tragic "Song and Dance" to Bruce Gillespie's sex joke, "Vegetable Love," to Stefan Vucak's feverish "Fulfillment." Randal Flyn's "Downward to the Sun" has more substance (a solid psychological speculation) but needs much more detail to bring out its feeling. (Most of the "love stories" are despairing, bitter, hopeless, or disgusted.) Of the dialogues, Andrew Whittemore's "Process" is stylized and good, but the others strike me as the too-bald ones novelists *would* write. (We playwrights know better.)

Of the other works Rob Gerrand's "The Healing Orgy" is an interesting initial situation and a good try at an imposed subject, although again a vignette and not a story, and Barbara J. Coleman's single-change tale is a clever idea restricted to one or two consequences and not the thorough-going revision of society that is science fiction's *sine qua non*. The only writer in the book I would actively warn is Edward Mundie, whose "The Gift" commits two classic mistakes: an enormously too-long time-span and the substitution of over-abstract feeling for specific action. There remain two superior single-change stories, David Grigg's and Pip Maddern's, both of which have the authentic strangeness of science fiction. Pip Maddern is indeed a very promising writer with her atmospheric (and oddly LeGuinian) "The Ins and Outs of the Hadhya City-

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State" (though I never believed that the communications taboos were severe enough to keep two sane beings from communicating a secret *quite* that simple) and "The Broken Pit" which is a first-rate story by any standards: funny, appealing, and economical (I especially liked the "bang-crash stuff").

And now I'm going to step right out of that story and kick it — and something else — to pieces.

For there is this alien dwarf Filek, see, and there's the alien dwarf Garn, and he's "he" and *he's* a "he" and the Gethenians are "he" and Pip Maddern's single-change story character is "he" and I'll *bet* you that Maddern's explorer of the Hadhya city-state is a "he" (the Hadhyan is) and yet both LeGuin and Maddern are *she's*, dammit, *she's*.

So what's up?

What's up is the nominally-male, normatively masculine usage that ensures that male will be the normal, the ordinary, and the neutral, and female the abnormal, special, and extraordinary all over the Galaxy — even when a female author is talking about childlike, dwarf extra-terrestrials who are (apparently) as sexless as turnips. This is not Pip Maddern's fault (or Ursula K. LeGuin's either) but surely science-fiction writers, of all people, ought not to submit tamely to this wholesale theft of pronomial normativeness. Bite your tongue and write "she"; if you look at it long enough, it will actually start looking human. And for extra-terrestrials, invent. What the normative-male usage does is to insist, usually below the level of conscious awareness, that all us she's are *special* people, confined to *special* (not broadly human) functions — or that we, like Gethenians, are (sort-of) male ninety percent of the time except when we revert to being (truly) female for the purposes of that special chapter of the human story called Sex and Reproduction. (It's enough to drive one piebald.) In a world that can naively produce Jacob Bronowski's "The Ascent of Man" (two of my writer friends call it "The Ascent of Guess Who" and "The Ascent of You Know Who") how does "she" enter the verbal world of science fiction when not pitchforked there by feminists or kept on the sidelines as an accessory for the special-topics business?

Simple: The Special Topic is expanded to overshadow all human activity.

This is what Cary Neeper does in *A Place Beyond Man* (a Bronowskiesque title, surely). "Tandra Grey," Neeper's heroine (and a Harlequin-romance name if I ever heard one), although ostensibly a biologist recruited by aliens to save Earth, really spends more than two hundred pages teasing the bejezus out of two yummy alien males: one humanoid, rational, mild, and ultra-controlled (but vulnerable) and one amphibian, explosive, sensual, and all over delectable green feathers (but also vulnerable). Neeper's biology back-

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grounds are detailed and she has imaginative energy, but she also brings in a Hollywood tot who talks baby-ese, indulges in a point-of-view that wanders all over the place, and goes on a lot about a vaguely-conceived "ecology" (anti-greed and anti-shortsightedness) which is Neeper's substitute for politics. *Place* is, in fact, stupefyingly apolitical, since Neeper is not really interested in saving Earth from ecological disaster but in female erotic fantasy. She's fairly good at it, it's fun, and it's certainly a relief from the plethora of male erotic fantasy in literature (I also enjoy it much more, naturally, although neither kind is better or worse *per se* than the other).

But *what* a fantasy!

For the erotics of *Place* is the classical anti-genital, feminine "romance" — libido as frustration. Time after time the characters indulge in super-heated hanky-panky only to roll over and go to sleep, frustrating the reader beyond endurance (if this is the direction you frustrate in). Twice the heroine and an alien male strip and feel each other all over (no, I am not making this up) after which one of them remarks Ah yes, our species are very different, and go placidly away. In a modern comedy like *Mash*, such goings-on would lead to heavy breathing in the supply room, and although writers aren't obliged to put erotics into science fiction at all (though I don't mind if they give me fantasies *I* like; I'm as placable as the next critic) it does seem reasonable to ask that horniness shall appear *as such*, not distorted into the super-subtle and analysis of non-existent emotion (this sort of thing occupies a lot of room in *Place)* or endless physical teasing. The heroine never gets together with one alien; she does with the other only after a marriage so monogamous it makes early Heinlein look like Hugh Hefner* and then after 221 pages of torrid build-up):

> "...the joy of conscious passion swept him ... into full, welcome release as their bodies sought and found each other in easy acceptance." (p. 222)

Pfaw.

Neeper didn't invent this kind of "romantic" fantasy any more than Poul Anderson (for example) is personally responsible for the eerily homosexual overtones of *The Star Fox* — both writers could hardly avoid them, since they are floating about in the cultural atmosphere — and Anderson, in addition, is certainly capable (like Michael Moorcock in his "Heroic romances") of putting his readers on. But writers ought to question the Blue Meanies that turn up in their typewriters, not just accept them gratefully. The anti-genital sexual romance is a natural female response to sexism, but it's self-destructive (it also muddles everything up). If Tandra and her alien, Conn,

*He will be monogamous but she won't, a piece of chutzpah of which the author seems placidly unaware.

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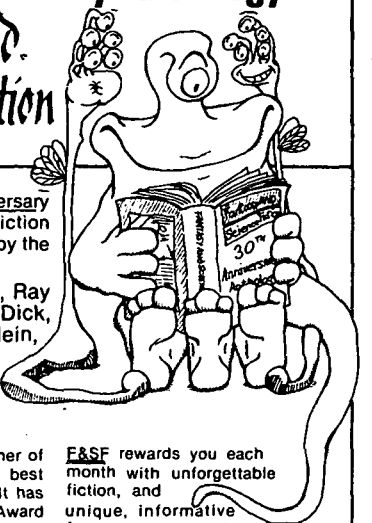

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could only get it on by page 20, not only could we have the erotic fun, we (and they) could also go on to other things and Cary Neeper might get to a place "beyond man" in truth where the Love and Sex specialty isn't the only thing the she's can do, and everyone can appear in all *their* variety, *person* doing what *per* wishes with *per* life, *na* proud of *nan*, *naself*, and *na* life.*

**The pronouns are from Marge Piercy's science-fiction novel,* Woman on the Edge of Time *and June Arnold's* The Cook and the Carpenter. *The usages become natural in the long works in question, although they would have the effect of exoticism in a short one, an effect a science fiction writer might well want in certain circumstances. The feminine-preferred is another possibility, one which would say a good deal about the society that used it. The masculine-preferred says much about our society but nothing (for example) about Maddern's aliens. When it becomes visible* as our usage, *it's distracting. Of course pronouns are by no means the major part of sexism, even linguistic sexism (which is not the major part of sexism), but words are a writer's business. (Marge Piercy once fought with magazine editors for weeks over an article in which she had things like "What will Man be like in the twenty-first century? She will be compassionate...." and so on.)*

COMING SOON

Next month: a never before published story by Olaf Stapledon, the English philosopher and novelist who wrote LAST AND FIRST MEN. Stapledon dies some years ago; this story, A MODERN MAGICIAN, was recently discovered among his papers and will appear here for the first time anywhere.

Soon: "Prose Bowl," an unusual novelet about writing as sport by Bill Pronzini and Barry Malzberg; "Out There Where the Big Ships Go," a fine sf novella by Richard Cowper, author of "Piper at the Gates of Dawn;" "The Merry Men of Methane," a new Stardust story by Stephen Tall, and much more.

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A man in his fifties, a defeated candidate for office, deserted by his family, returns to a family house that contains the seeds of his failures, a house that may be haunted. Edward Bryant's "Stone," February 1978, recently received a Nebula nomination for best short story of the year.

Teeth Marks

BY

EDWARD BRYANT

My favorite vantage has always been the circular window at the end of the playroom. It is cut from the old-fashioned glass installed by Frank Alessi's father. As a young man, he built this house with his own hands. The slight distortions in the pane create a rainbow sheen when the light is proper. I enjoy the view so much more than those seen through the standard rectangular windows on the other floors, the panes regularly smashed by the enthusiasms of the younger Alessis through the years and duly replaced. The circular window is set halfway between the hardwood floor and the peak of the gabled ceiling, low enough that I can watch the outside world from a chair.

Watching window scenes with slight distortions and enhanced colors satisfies my need for stimulation, since I don't read, nor go out to films, nor do I ever turn on the cold television console in the study. Sometimes I see jays quarreling with magpies, robins descending for meals on the unkempt lawn, ducks in the autumn and spring. I see the clouds form and roil through a series of shapes. The scene is hardly static, though it might seem such to a less patient observer. Patience must be my most obvious virtue, fixed here as I am on this eternal cutting edge of the present.

I possess my minor powers, but complete foreknowledge is not numbered among them. Long since taking up residence here, I've explored the dimensions of the house. Now I spend the bulk of my time in what I consider the most comfortable room in the house. I haunt the old-fashioned circular window, and I wait.

***

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Frank Alessi took a certain bitter pleasure in driving his own car. All the years he'd had a staff and driver, he had forgotten the autonomous freedoms of the road. The feel of the wheel in his hands was a little heady. Any time he wanted, any time at all, he could twist the steering wheel a few degrees and direct the Ford into the path of a Trailways bus or a logging truck. It was his decision, reaffirmed from minute to minute on the winding mountain highway, his alone. He glanced at the girl beside him, not hearing what she was saying. She wouldn't be smiling so animatedly if she knew he was chilling his mind with an image of impalement on a bridge railing.

Her name was Sally Lakey, and he couldn't help thinking of her as a girl even though she'd told him at least three times that she had celebrated her twentieth birthday the week before.

"...*that* Alessi?" she said.

He nodded and half smiled.

"Yeah, really?" She cocked her head like some tropical bird and stared from large dark eyes.

Alessi nodded again and didn't smile.

"That's really something. Yeah, I recognize you from the papers now. You're you." She giggled. "I even saw you last spring. In the campaign."

"The campaign," he repeated.

Lakey said apologetically, "Well, actually I didn't watch you much. What it comes down to is that I'm pretty apolitical, you know?"

Alessi forced another half-smile. "I could have used your vote."

"I wasn't registered."

Alessi shrugged mentally and returned his attention to the awesome drop-offs that tugged at the car on Lakey's side. Gravel and raw rock gave way to forest and then to valley floor. Much of the valley was cleared and quilted with irrigated squares. It's a much tamer country than when I left, Alessi thought.

"I'm really sorry I didn't vote."

"What?" Distracted, Alessi swerved slightly to avoid two fist-sized rocks that had rolled onto the right-hand lane probably during the night.

"I think you're a nice man. I said I'm sorry I didn't vote."

"It's a little late for that." Alessi envenomed the words. He heard the tone of pettiness, recognized it, said the words anyway.

"Don't blame me, Mr. Alessi," she said. "Really, I'm not stupid. You can't blame me for losing...Senator."

I'm being reproached, he thought, by a drop-out, wet-behind-the-ears girl. Me, a fifty-seven-year-old man. A fifty-seven-year-old unemployable. God damn it! The rage he thought he'd exorcised in San Francisco rose up again. He thought the rim of the steering wheel would shatter under his fingers into jagged, slashing shards.

Lakey must have seen something in his eyes. She moved back across the front seat and wedged herself uneasily

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into the juncture of bench seat and door. "You, uh, all right?"

"Yes," said Alessi. He willed the muscles cording his neck to relax, with little effect. "I am very sorry I snapped at you, Sally."

"It's okay." But she looked dubious of the sincerity of his apology.

They rode in silence for another few miles. She'll talk, thought Alessi. Sooner or later.

Sooner. "How soon?"

"Before we get to the house? Not long. The turn-off's another few miles." And what the hell, he asked himself, are you doing taking a kid little better than a third your age to the half-remembered refuge where you're going to whimper, crawl in and pull the hole in after you? It's perhaps the worst time in your life and you're acting the part of a horny old man. You've known her a grand total of eight hours. No, he answered himself. More than that. She reminds me — He tensed. She asked me if she could come along. Remember? She asked me.

I see the dark-blue sedan turn into the semicircular driveway and slide between the pines toward the house. Tires crunch on drifted cones and dead leaves; the crisp sound rises toward me. I stretch to watch as the auto nears the porch and passes below the angle of my sight. The engine dies. I hear a car door slam. Another one. For some reason it had not occurred to me that Frank might bring another person.

The equations of the house must be altered.

They stood silently for a while, looking up at the house. It was a large house, set in scale by the towering mountains beyond. Wind hissed in the pine needles; otherwise the only sound was the broken buzz of a logging truck down-shifting far below on the highway.

"It's lovely," Lakey said.

"That's the original building." Alessi pointed. "My father put it together in the years before the First World War. The additions were constructed over a period of decades."

"It must have twenty rooms."

"Ought to have been a hotel," said Alessi. "Never was. Dad liked baronial space. Some of the rooms are sealed off, never used."

"What's that?" Lakey stabbed a finger at the third floor. "The thing that looks like a porthole."

"Old glass, my favorite window when I was a kid. Behind it is a room that's been used variously as a nursery, playroom and guest room."

Lakey stared at the glass. "I thought I saw something move."

"Probably a tree shadow, or maybe a squirrel's gotten in. It wasn't the caretaker — I phoned ahead last night; he's in bed with his arthritis. Nobody else has been in the house in close to twenty years."

"I did see something," she said stubbornly.

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"It isn't haunted."

She looked at him with a serious face. "How do you know?"

"No one ever died in there."

Lakey shivered. "I'm cold."

"We're at seven thousand feet." He took a key from an inside pocket of his coat. "Come in and I'll make a fire."

"Will you check the house first?"

"Better than that," he said, "*we* will check the house."

The buzz of voices drifts to the window. I am loath to leave my position behind the glass. Steps, one set heavier, one lighter, sound on the front walk. Time seems suspended as I wait for the sound of a key inserted into the latch. I anticipate the door opening. Not wanting to surprise the pair, I settle back.

Though they explored the old house together, Lakey kept forging ahead as though to assert her courage. Fine, thought Alessi. If there is something lurking in a closet, let it jump out and get *her*. The thought was only whimsical; he was a rational man.

Something did jump out of a closet at her — or at least it seemed to. Lakey opened the door at the far end of a second-floor bedroom and recoiled. A stack of photographs, loose and in albums displaced from precarious balance on the top shelf, cascaded to her feet. A plume of fine dust rose.

"There's always avalanche danger in the mountains," said Alessi.

She stopped coughing. "Very funny." Lakey knelt and picked up a sheaf of pictures. "Your family?"

Alessi studied the photographs over her shoulder. "Family, friends, holidays, vacation shots. Everyone in the family had a camera."

"You too?"

He took the corner of a glossy landscape between thumb and forefinger. "At one time I wanted to be a Stieglitz or a Cartier-Bresson, or even a Mathew Brady. Do you see the fuzz of smoke?"

She examined the photograph closely. "No."

"That's supposed to be a forest fire. I was not a good photographer. Photographs capture the present, and that in turn immediately becomes the past. My father insistently directed me to the future."

Lakey riffled through the pictures and stopped at one portrait. Except for his dress, the man might have doubled for Alessi. His gray hair was cut somewhat more severely than the Senator's. He sat stiffly upright behind a wooden desk, staring directly at the camera.

Alessi answered the unspoken question. "My father."

"He looks very distinguished," said Lakey. Her gaze flickered up to meet his. "So do you."

"He wanted something more of a dynasty than what he got. But he tried to mold one; he really did. Every inch a mover and shaker," Alessi said sardonically. "He stayed here in the

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mountains and raped a fortune."

"Raped?" she said.

"Reaped. Raped. No difference. The timber went for progress and, at the time, nobody objected. My father taught me about power and I learned the lessons well. When he deemed me prepared, he sent me out to amass my own fortune in power — political, not oil or uranium. I went to the legislature and then to Washington. Now I'm home again."

"Home," she said, softening his word. "I think maybe you're leaving out some things." He didn't answer. She stopped at another picture. "Is this your mother?"

"No." He stared at the sharp features for several seconds. "That is Mrs. Norrinssen, an ironbound, more-Swedish-than-thou, pagan lady who came out here from someplace in the Dakotas. My father hired her to — take care of me in lieu of my mother."

Lakey registered his hesitation, then said uncertainly, "What happened to your mother?"

Alessi silently sorted through the remainder of the photographs. Toward the bottom of the stack, he found what he was looking for and extracted it. A slender woman, short-haired and of extraordinary beauty, stared past the camera; or perhaps *through* the camera. Her eyes had a distant, unfocused quality. She stood in a stand of dark spruce, her hands folded.

"It's such a moody picture," said Lakey.

The pines loomed above Alessi's mother, conical bodies appearing to converge in the upper portion of the grainy print. "I took that," said Alessi. "She didn't know. It was the last picture anyone took of her."

"She...died?"

"Not exactly. I suppose so. No one knows."

"I don't understand," said Lakey.

"She was a brilliant, lonely, unhappy lady," said Alessi. "My father brought her out here from Florida. She hated it. The mountains oppressed her; the winters depressed her. Every year she retreated further into herself. My father tried to bring her out of it, but he treated her like a child. She resisted his pressures. Nothing seemed to work." He lapsed again into silence.

Finally Lakey said, "What happened to her?"

"It was after Mrs. Norrinssen had been here for two years. My mother's emotional state had been steadily deteriorating. Mrs. Norrinssen was the only one who could talk with her, or perhaps the only one with whom my mother would talk. One autumn day — it was in October. My mother got up before everyone else and walked out into the woods. That was that."

"That can't be all," said Lakey. "Didn't anyone look?"

"Of course we looked. My father hired trackers and dogs and the sheriff brought in his searchers. They trailed her deep into the pine forest and then lost her. They spent weeks. Then the

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snows increased and they gave up. There's a stone out behind the house in a grove, but no one's buried under it."

"Jesus," Lakey said softly. She put her arms around Alessi and gave him a slow, warm hug. The rest of the photographs fluttered to the hardwood floor.

I wait, I wait. I see no necessity of movement, not for now. I am patient. No longer do I go to the round window. My vigil is being rewarded. There is no reason to watch the unknowing birds, the forest, the road. The clouds have no message for me today.

I hear footsteps on the stair, and that is message enough.

"Most of the attic," said Alessi, "was converted into a nursery for me. My father always looked forward. He believed in constant renovation. As I became older, the nursery evolved to a playroom, though it was still the room where I slept. After my father died, I moved back here with my family for a few years. This was Connie's room."

"Your wife or your —"

"Daughter. For whatever reason, she preferred this to all the other rooms."

They stood just inside the doorway. The playroom extended most of the length of the house. Alessi imagined he could see the straight, carefully crafted lines of construction curving toward one another in perspective. Three dormer windows were spaced evenly along the eastern pitch of the ceiling. The round window allowed light to enter at the far end.

"It's huge," said Lakey.

"It outscales children. It was an adventure to live here. Sometimes it was very easy for me to imagine I was playing in a jungle or on a sea, or across a trackless Arctic waste."

"Wasn't it scary?"

"My father didn't allow that," said Alessi. Nor did I later on, he thought.

Lakey marveled. "The furnishings are incredible." The canopied bed, the dressers and vanity, the shelves and chairs, all were obviously products of the finest woodcraft. "Not a piece of plastic in all this." She laughed. "I love it." In her denim jeans and Pendleton shirt, she pirouetted. She stopped in front of a set of walnut shelves. "Are the dolls your daughter's?"

Alessi nodded. "My father was not what you would call a liberated man. Connie collected them all during her childhood." He carefully picked up a figure with a silk nineteenth-century dress and china head.

Lakey eagerly moved from object to object like a butterfly sampling flowers. "That horse! I always wanted one."

"My father made it for me. It's probably the most exactingly carpentered hobbyhorse made."

Lakey gingerly seated herself on the horse. Her feet barely touched the floor. "It's so big." She rocked back

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and forth, leaning against the leather reins. Not a joint squeaked.

Alessi said, "He scaled it so it would be a child's horse, not a pony. you might call these training toys for small adults."

The woman let the horse rock to a stop. She dismounted and slowly approached a tubular steel construction. A six-foot horizontal ladder connected the top rungs of two vertical four-foot ladders. "What on earth is this?"

Alessi was silent for a few seconds. "That is a climbing toy for three- and four-year-olds."

"But it's too big," said Lakey. "Too high."

"Not," said Alessi, "with your toes on one rung and your fingers on the next — just barely."

"It's impossible."

Alessi shook his head. "Not quite; just terrifying."

"But why?" she said. "Did you do this for fun?"

"Dad told me to. When I balked, he struck me. When he had to, my father never discounted the effect of force."

Lakey looked disconcerted. She turned away from the skeletal bridge toward a low table shoved back against the wall.

"Once there was a huge map of fairyland on the wall above the table," said Alessi. "Mrs. Norrinssen gave it to me. I can remember the illustrations, the ogres and frost giants and fairy castles. In a rage one night, my father ripped it to pieces."

Lakey knelt before the table so she could look on a level with the stuffed animals. "It's a whole zoo!" She reached out to touch the plush hides.

"More than a zoo," said Alessi. "A complete bestiary. Some of those critters don't exist. See the unicorn on the end?"

Lakey's attention was elsewhere. "The bear," she said, greedily reaching like a small child. "He's beautiful. I had one like him when I was little." She gathered the stuffed bear into her arms and hugged it. The creature was almost half her size. "What's his name? I called mine Bear. Is he yours?"

Alessi nodded. "And my daughter's. His name is Bear too. Mrs. Norrinssen made him."

She traced her finger along the bear's head, over his ears, down across the snout. Bear's hide was virtually seamless, sewn out of some rich pile fabric. After all the years, Bear's eyes were still black and shiny.

"The eyes came from the same glazier who cut the round window. Good nineteenth-century glass."

"This is wild," said Lakey. She touched the teeth.

"I don't really know whether it was Mrs. Norrinssen's idea or my father's," said Alessi. "A hunter supplied them. They're real. Mrs. Norrinssen drilled small holes toward the back of each tooth; they're secured inside the lining." Bear's mouth was lined with black leather, pliable to Lakey's questing finger. "Don't let him bite you."

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"Most bears' mouths are closed," said Lakey.

"Yes."

"It didn't stop my Bear from talking to me."

"Mine didn't have to overcome that barrier." Alessi suddenly listened to what he was saying. Fifty-seven years old. He smiled self-consciously.

They stood silently for a few seconds; Lakey continued to hug the bear. "It's getting dark," she said. The sun had set while they explored the house. The outlines of solid shapes in the playroom had begun to blur with twilight. Doll faces shone almost luminously in the dusk.

"We'll get the luggage out of the car," said Alessi.

"Could I stay up here?"

"You mean tonight?" She nodded. "I see no reason why not," he said. He thought, did I really plan this?

Lakey stepped closer. "What about you?"

I watch them both. Frank Alessi very much resembles his father: distinguished. He looks harried, worn, but that is understandable. Some information I comprehend without knowing why. Some perceptions I don't have to puzzle over. I know that I see.

The woman is in her early twenties. She has mobile features, a smiling, open face. She is quick to react. Her eyes are as dark as her black hair. They dart back and forth in their sockets, her gaze lighting upon nearly everything in the room but rarely dwelling. Her speech is rapid with a hint of eastern nasality. Except for her manner of speaking, she reminds me of a dear memory.

For a moment I see four people standing in the playroom. Two are reflections in the broad, hand-silvered mirror above the vanity across the room. Two people are real. They hesitantly approach each other, a step at a time. Their arms extend, hands touch, fingers plait. Certainly at this time, in this place, they have found each other. The mirror images are inexact, but I think only I see that. The couple in the mirror seem to belong to another time. And, of course, I am there in the mirror too — though no one notices me.

"That's, uh, very gratifying to my ego," said Alessi. "But do you know how old I am?"

Lakey nodded. The semi darkness deepened. "I have some idea."

"I'm old enough to —"

"—be my father. I know." She said lightly, "So?"

"So..." He took his hands away from hers. In the early night the dolls seemed to watch them. The shiny button eyes of Bear and the other animals appeared turned toward the human pair.

"Yes," she said. "I think it's a good idea." She took his hand again. "Come on, we'll get the stuff out of the car. It's been a long day."

Day, Alessi thought. Long week,

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long month, longer campaign. A lifetime. The headlines flashed in his mind, television commentaries replayed. It all stung like acid corroding what had been cold, shining and clean. Old, old, old, like soldiers and gunfighters. How had he missed being cleanly shot? Enough had seem to want that. To fade... "I *am* a little bushed," he said. He followed Lakey out toward the stairs.

Frank Alessi's father was forceful in his ideal. That lent the foundation to that time and this place. Strength was virtue. "Fair is fair," he would say, but the fairness was all his. Such power takes time to dissipate. Mrs. Norrinssen stood up to that force; everyone else eventually fled.

"Witchy bitch!" he would storm. She only stared back at him from calm, glacial eyes until he sputtered and snorted and came to rest like a great, sulky, but now gentled beast. Mrs. Norrinssen was a woman of extraordinary powers and she tapped ancient reserves.

Structure persists. I am part of it. That is my purpose and I cannot turn aside. Now I wait in the newly inhabited house. Again I hear the positive, metallic sounds of automobile doors and a trunk lid opening and closing. I hear the voices and the footsteps and appreciate the human touch they lend.

She stretched slowly. "What time is it?"

"Almost ten," said Alessi.

"I saw you check your watch. I thought you'd be asleep. Not enough exercise?"

She giggled and Alessi was surprised to find the sound did not offend him as it had earlier in the day. He rolled back toward her and lightly kissed her lips. "Plenty of exercise."

"You were really nice."

Fingertips touched his face, exploring cheekbones, mouth corners, the stubble on the jowl line. That made him slightly nervous; his body was still tight. Tennis, handball, swimming, it all helped. Reasonably tight. Only slight concessions to slackness. But after all, he *was* — Shut up, he told himself.

"I feel very comfortable with you," she said.

Don't talk, he thought. Don't spoil it.

Lakey pressed close. "Say something."

No.

"Are you nervous?"

"No," Alessi said. "Of course not."

"I guess I did read about the divorce," said Lakey. "It was in a picture magazine in my gynecologist's office."

"There isn't much to say. Marge couldn't take the heat. She got out. I can't blame her." But silently he denied that. The Watergate people — *their* wives stood by. All the accumulated

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years.... Betrayal is so goddamned nasty. Wish her well in Santa Fe?

"Tell me about your daughter," said Lakey.

"Connie — why her?"

"You've talked about everyone else. You haven't said a thing about Connie except to say she slept in this room." She paused. "In this bed?"

"We both did," said Alessi, "at different times."

"The stuff about the divorce didn't really mention her, at least not that I remember. Where is she?"

"I truly don't know."

Lakey's voice sounded peculiar. "She disappeared, uh, just like—"

"No. She left." Silently: she left me. Just like —

"You haven't heard from her? Nothing?"

"Not in several years. It was her choice; we didn't set detectives on her. The last we heard, she was living in the street in some backwater college town in Colorado."

"I mean, you didn't try—"

"It was her choice." She always said I didn't *allow* her any choice, he thought. Maybe. But I tried to handle her as my father handled me. And *I* turned out—

"What was she like?"

Alessi caressed her long smooth hair; static electricity snapped and flashed. "Independent, intelligent, lovely. I suppose fathers tend to be biased."

"How old is she?"

"Connie was about your age when she left." He realized he had answered the question in the past tense.

"You're not so old yourself," said Lakey, touching him strategically. "Not old at all."

Moonlight floods through the dormer panes; beyond the round window I see starlight fleck the sky. I am very quiet, though I need not be. The couple under the quilted coverlet are enthralled in their passion. I cannot question their motives yet. Love? I doubt it. Affection? I would approve of that. Physical attraction, craving for bodily contact, psychic tension?

I move to my window in the end of the playroom, leaving the love-making behind. The aesthetics of the bed are not as pleasing as the placid starfield. It may be that I am accustomed to somewhat more stately cycles and pulsings.

Perhaps it is the crowding of the house, the apprehension that more than one human body dwells within it, that causes me now to feel a loneliness. I wonder where Mrs. Norrinssen settled after the untimely death of her employer. "A bad bargain," he said somberly time after time. "Very bad indeed." And she only smiled back, never maliciously or with humor, but patiently. She had given him what he wanted. "But still a bargain," she said.

I am aware of the sounds subsiding from the canopied bed. I wonder if both now will abandon themselves to

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dreams and to sleep. A shadow dips silently past the window, a nighthawk. Faintly I hear the cries of hunting birds.

He came awake suddenly with teeth worrying his guilty soul. Connie glared at him from dark eyes swollen from crying and fury. She shook long black hair back from her shoulders. "...drove her through the one breakdown and into another." He dimly heard the words. "She's out of it, and good for her. No more campaigns. You won't do the same to me, you son of a bitch." Bitter smile. "Or I should say, you son of a bastard."

"I can't change these things. I'm just trying—" Alessi realized he was shaking in the darkness.

"What's wrong, now what's wrong?" said Connie.

Alessi cried out once, low.

"Baby, what is it?"

He saw Lakey's face in the pooled moonlight. "You." He reached out to touch her cheek and grazed her nose.

"Me," she said. "Who else?"

"Jesus," Alessi said. "Oh God."

"Bad dream?"

Orientation slowly settled in. "A nightmare." He shook his head violently.

"Tell me about it?"

"I can't remember."

"So don't tell me if you don't want to." She gathered him close, blotting the sweat on his sternum with the sheet.

He said dreamily, "You always plan to make it up, but after a while it's too late."

"What's too late?"

Alessi didn't answer. He lay rigid beside her.

I see them in the gilt-framed mirror and I see them in bed. I feel both a terrible sympathy for her and an equally terrible love for him. For as long as I can recall, I've husbanded proprietary feelings about this house and those in it.

Frank Alessi makes me understand. I remember the woman's touch and cherish that feeling, though I simultaneously realize her touch was yet another's. I also remember Frank's embrace. I have touched all of them.

I love all these people. That terrifies me.

I want to tell him, you *can* change things, Frank.

Sometime after midnight he awoke again. The night had encroached; moonlight now filled less than a quarter of the playroom. Alessi lay still, staring at shadow patterns. He heard Lakey's soft, regular breathing beside him.

He lay without moving for what seemed to be hours. When he checked his watch only minutes had passed. Recumbent, he waited, assuming that for which he waited was sleep.

Sleep had started to settle about Alessi when he thought he detected a

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movement across the room. Part vague movement, part snatch of sound, it was *something*. Switching on the bedtable lamp, Alessi saw nothing. He held his breath for long seconds and listened. Still nothing. The room held only its usual complement of inhabitants: dolls, toys, stuffed creatures. Bear stared back at him. The furniture was all familiar. Everything was in its place, natural. He felt his pulse speeding. He turned off the light and settled back against the pillow.

It's one o'clock in the soul, he thought. Not quite Fitzgerald, but it will do. He remembered Lakey in the car that afternoon asking why he had cut and run. That wasn't the exact phraseology, but it was close enough. So what if he had been forced out of office? He still could have found some kind of political employment. Alessi had not told her about all the records unsubpoenaed as well as subpoenaed — at first. Then, perversely, he had started to catalog the sordid details the investigating committees had decided not to use. After a while she had turned her head back toward the clean mountain scenery. He continued the list. Finally she had told him to shut up. She turned back toward him gravely, had told him it was all right — she had forgiven him. It had been simple and sincere.

I don't need easy forgiveness, he thought. Nor would *I* forgive. That afternoon he had lashed out at her. "Damn it, what do you know about these things — about responsibility and power? You're a hippy — or whatever hippies are called now. Did you ever make a single solitary decision that put you on the line? Made you a target for second-guessing, carping analysis, sniping, unabashed viciousness?" The overtaut spring wound down.

Lakey visibly winced; muscles tightened around her mouth. "Yes," she said.

"So tell me."

She stared back at him like a small surprised animal. "I've been traveling a long time. Before I left, I was pregnant." Her voice flattened; Alessi strained to hear the words. "They told me it should have been a daughter."

He focused his attention back on the road. There was nothing to say. He knew about exigencies. He could approve.

"None of them wanted me to do it. They made it more than it really was. When I left, my parents told me they would never speak to me again. They haven't."

Alessi frowned.

"I loved them."

Alessi heard her mumble, make tiny incoherent sounds. She shifted in her sleep in a series of irregular movements. Her voice raised slightly in volume. The words still were unintelligible. Alessi recognized the tenor; she was dreaming of fearful things. He stared intently: his vision blurred.

Gently he gathered Connie into his

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arms and stroked her hair. "I will make it right for you. I know, I know... I can."

"No,".she said, the word sliding into a moan. Sharply, "No."

"I am your father."

But she ignored him.

I hear more than I can see. I hear the woman come fully awake, her moans sliding raggedly up the register to screams; pain — not love; shock — not passion. I would rather not listen, but I have no choice. So I hear the desperation of a body whose limbs are trapped between strangling linens and savage lover. I hear the endless, pounding slap of flesh against meat. Finally I hear the words, the words, the cruel words and the ineffectual. Worst of all, I hear the cries. I hear them in sadness.

Earlier I could not object. But now he couples with her not out of love, not from affection, but to force her. No desire, no lust, no desperate pleasure save inarticulate power.

Finally she somehow frees herself and scrambles off the bed. She stumbles through the unfamiliar room and slams against the wall beside the door. Only her head intrudes into the moonlight. her mouth is set in a rigid, silent oval. The wet blackness around her eyes is more than shadow. She says nothing. She fumbles for the door, claws the knob, is gone. He does not pursue her.

I hear the sound of the woman's stumbling steps. I hear her pound on the doors of the car Alessi habitually locks. The sounds of her flight diminish in the night. She will be safer with the beasts of the mountain.

Alessi endlessly slammed his fist into the bloody pillow. His body shook until the inarticulate rage began to burn away. Then he got up from the bed and crossed the playroom to the great baroque mirror.

"This time could have been different," he said. "I wanted it to be."

His eyes adjusted to the darkness. A thin sliver of moonlight striped the ceiling. Alessi confronted the creature in the mirror. He raised his hands in fists and battered them against unyielding glass, smashed them against the mirror until the surface fragmented into glittering shards. He presented his wrists, repeating in endless rote, "Different, this time, different...."

Then he sensed what lay behind him in the dark. Alessi swung around, blood arcing. Time overcame him. The warm, coppery smell rose up in the room.

Perhaps the house now is haunted; that I cannot say. My own role is ended. Again I am alone; and now lonely. This morning I have not looked through the round window. The carrion crows are inside my mind picking at the bones of memories.

I watch Frank Alessi across the stained floor of the playroom.

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The house is quiet; I'm sure that will not continue. The woman will have reached the highway and surely has been found by now. She will tell her story and then the people will come.

For a time the house will be inhabited by many voices and many bodies. The people will look at Frank Alessi and his wrists and his blood. They will remark upon the shattered mirror. They may even note the toys; note me; wonder at the degree of the past preserved here in the house. I doubt they can detect the pain in my old-fashioned eyes. .

They will search for answers.

But they can only question why Frank came here, and why he did what he did. They cannot see the marks left by the teeth of the past. Only the blood.

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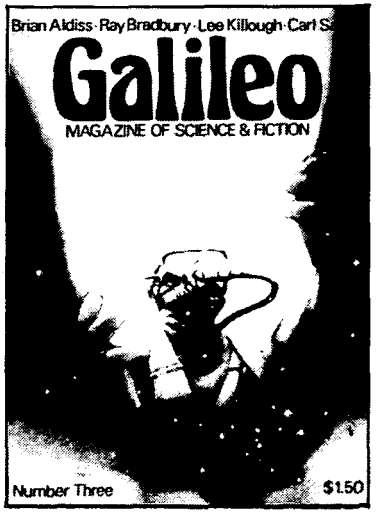

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In which a representative from the Peace Foundation is sent to the planet of Lorenzoni, the scene of a mysterious conflict, the most one-sided war in the history of the galaxy.

Victory

BY
FRED SABERHAGEN

Along with everyone else on the Shearwater interplanetary ship, Nicholas Shen-yang had a bad five minutes or so of waiting to die, not knowing whether the Condamine patrol craft had decided to blast them or board them. Not until they heard and felt the clunk of hull against hull were the would-be blockade runners reasonably certain that the enemy had chosen to capture them and let them live.

Hands behind his head, face to the bulkhead along with the Shearwater crew, Shen-yang got through the next five minutes in silence, even when something that must have been a gun barrel was rammed into his back hard enough to leave a bruise. That was after the first quick personal search and was meant to emphasize an order that he should get the hell over there with the others who had been searched and sit down. The voice issuing the order sounded strangely accented to him, but the message was quite understandable. Condamine, Shearwater, and the multitude of other states making up the so-called civilized galaxy shared at least one common language, inherited from old parent Earth, which fact tended to make events like this boarding a little less difficult for all concerned.

More minutes passed before Shen-yang got the chance to show his diplomatic card when a junior officer of the boarding party came around checking identification. After the officer had glowered at him in suspicious fury for half a minute — only a born trouble-maker would be carrying such a card, to upset the officer's smooth routine — Shen-yang was quickly transferred to the boarding party's launch. His brief passage through the flexible tunnel connecting the two craft allowed him a

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glimpse of space through its transparent windows. There was Shearwater, the planet he had left yesterday, a full bright dot looking like Jupiter as seen from Earth — except that Shearwater appeared against a backdrop of pearly, soft, faint clouds of whitish nebula, the nebula whose slow drift had cut this solar system off from the galactic world for almost fifty standard years. And somewhere in the dazzle sunward must be the crescent of Lorenzoni, the war-torn world that was his goal, but he had no time to try to pick it out.

He was calmly unresisting as burly marines aboard the launch shoved him into a space that must have been meant as a closet and locked the door on him. Capture meant nothing essential to Shen-yang, as far as the success of his mission was concerned. He had been going to visit both sides on Lorenzoni anyway, and if fate insisted that he drop in on the aggressors first, so be it.

He had just been beginning to know and like the Shearwater crew, a half-dozen experienced blockade runners whose swagger still had something self-conscious about it, and he hoped they would manage to come through this in good shape. Likely they would remain as prisoners aboard their own ship, while a Condamine prize crew brought her in. From what Shen-yang had heard of the war so far, there was some hope that they might get home later in a prisoner exchange....

At last he heard the sounds of separation, as the launch departed from the captured smuggler. A minute later came the solid *chunk* of her arrival at her berth in what must be a sizable war vessel.

When Shen-yang was brought off the launch, the Condaminer captain was there to introduce himself, in stiffly correct style, and treat him to another penetrating glare. A minute or two later, in a room or cell almost big enough to be called a cabin, the captain — naturally enough wondering just what sort of diplomat he had bagged so accidentally and what the effect was going to be upon his own career — came to talk with him a little more.

"Your government does know I'm coming, Captain, though they'll no doubt be surprised when I show up in your custody. By the way, I hope the crew of the ship you just captured are being cared for properly?"

"Better than they deserve, in my opinion."

"What did they really have aboard as cargo? They told me it was only medical supplies, and I'd like to know if you found anything else."

The captain frowned, and his heavy jaw twitched, as if he might be having a hard time trying to re-program himself for diplomacy. "From the little bit I've seen so far," he admitted finally, "it looks as if that might be so. On this particular ship."

"Nobody denies that Shearwater ships bring in military cargo too. At least once in a while."

"Once in a while, huh?" And that

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ended the conversation for the present.

Faster-than-light travel being impossible this deep inside the gravitational well of a solar system, the approach to Lorenzoni took the patrol ship two more days. Free to spend a good deal of his time out of his tiny cabin, Shen-yang during this time got a good look at the nearing planet. It was an Earth-type ball circling a Sol-type sun, and it had been colonized, directly from Earth, a good many centuries ago.

With the slight magnification available from a viewport, he studied the land mass of Condamine when it was on nightside and drew the immediate conclusion that the Condaminers feared no attack from space. The glow of a thousand cities and towns shone forth with open cheerfulness.

Some ten hours later he took another look, at considerably closer range, and caught Ungava, the other sizable continent, in darkness. The blackness enfolding it was eerie — it was not a cloud cover, for there was the ghostly reflected sparkle of the nebula off the great poisoned lakes, and the coastline showed distinctly. But there was not a sign of human civilization, under conditions where the light sparks of every town of twenty thousand or more should have been visible. Shen-yang was a traveled man, and this reminded him of Stone Age worlds and worlds where mindless creatures ruled supreme.

Even as he meditated upon the meaning of this darkness, there came a sudden pinpoint dazzle right in the middle of it. The flash was over in a moment, but he knew it had been there. Yet another nuclear strike from Condamine; he thought, as if they still feared the very space where their enemies' cities had once stood — feared that in that deep night one building stone might still be raised upon another.

The captain later confirmed his thoughts about the flash. "Yeah, we still hit 'em that way from time to time, when recon confirms some kind of buildup that would make a worthwhile target."

The captain drank some coffee and seemed not about to say more; so Shen-yang prodded him: "But isn't it obvious that the war is really over? I mean you hit them, as you put it, forty-six years ago, with everything you had. That's the way I've heard it." The captain's eyes flicked over at him, but not denying anything, and Shen-yang went on: "Their cities are all wiped out — right? Your cities are untouched. Their casualties in that first strike were more than one hundred million — isn't that so? God knows what they've been since or how many people are still alive inside Ungava."

A little snort. "Too bloody many."

"Your casualties in the whole war are nowhere near that figure. Condamine has a population of between two and three hundred million people.

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Your industry is intact —"

"There's the terrorists." The captain's voice was milder than his looks. "Every week something is blown up."

"So? Maybe there's more of that than I've heard about. Look, I'm here trying to learn, to understand. When I say something you know is wrong, please straighten me out. Okay?"

"Okay."

"Now isn't your industry essentially intact?"

"Well, yes." The captain looked at him, and amplified: "But theirs is too, more than you'd think. They're dug in like you wouldn't believe now, and dispersed. Nothing centralized any more."

"You've seen how it is over there?"

A shrug. "Common knowledge."

"Ungava's not going to blast you, are they? And they're not going to invade you. I mean, if *your* three invasion tries on *their* continent couldn't settle the war —?"

"By God, I wish they'd try that."

"But they won't. So, they're not really all that dangerous to Condamine, not now at least. *Hasn't the war really been over, Captain, for the last forty-six years?*"

The other stood up, outraged though not surprised. His face had been grim before, but now it was beginning to look dangerous. "Tell that to my buddy, who was killed last month. He'll have a good laugh."

* * *

At the military spaceport on Condamine, Shen-yang walked down the ramp from the great sphere of the patrol ship, under a sunny sky tinged green near the horizon. A sprightly wind made banners snap; a good day, he thought, for a parade.

Three harried-looking civilians stood at the foot of the ramp, looking up it anxiously. At first glance Shen-yang knew they had come for him. Hurtling with them in a buried tubecar toward the capital city, Vellore, and the foreign minister who waited there to see him, Shen-yang chatted with the three and lamented the fact that this mode of travel kept him from appreciating the beauties of the countryside. Aboard ship he had been told this was the best season to see the blooms.

They assured him that he would have a chance, tomorrow or the next day. They were relieved that he accepted his capture in space so equably and had no real maltreatment to complain of. His own thought was that he who chooses to ride with smugglers must take some chances. He had not come for a sterile protocol tour but to find out what was going on.

"Have you read Orwell?" his boss at the foundation, a hundred light-years distant, had asked him just before he left.

"Orwell. Yes, a little anyway."

"Remember the bit in *1984*, where a man is asked to envision the future as 'a boot, stamping on a human face,

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forever'? That bit's always stuck in my mind."

"I can well imagine." Now that it was mentioned, he did recall it.

"I think the world I'm sending you to look at may furnish an example. Nick — what's the most terrible conclusion you can imagine for a war?"

"I don't know. Everybody killed on both sides."

"That's bad, all right. But what we're looking at on Lorenzoni may be something more Orwellian and therefore — *I* think — even worse. What about no conclusion at all? The winner knocks out the loser with the first punch and then goes on beating until his victim dies — and then goes on beating some more."

"Ungava's certainly not completely dead."

"That's what the Condaminers say. I think they're keeping the so-called conflict going, to distract their own people from other matters. Just what, I don't know."

"That ploy is common enough in history. What did you think of the Ungavan envoy?" The first ship out of the Lorenzoni-Shearwater system when the nebula parted had brought such a personage, pleading the cause of his tormented people to the galaxy.

Dr. Nicobar considered, brushing back long gray hair from her eyes. "He's a very good talker. He tells how, somehow, dug in against the hail of missiles, working wonders of medical research against radiation poisoning — all good achievements due to the High Leader, of course — Ungavan life and heroic resistance go on. He understates, or gives the impression that he's understating. He — I don't know, I wanted to like him and I couldn't, quite. For a man who represents an absolute dictatorship, he's perhaps just a little too good, too gentle-saintish, to be taken at face value."

"And what about the man from Condamine?" He had come out on the second ship.

"In the brief exchange I had with him, he didn't seem to want to talk about the war at all, just about Condamine's rejoining the League of Galactic Nations. I'm going to talk to him again, of course. But, meanwhile, there's a ship leaving tomorrow to go in, and I want us to have a representative on it. Here's your diplomatic card. Go there and see for yourself, and think for yourself, and report personally to me when you come out."

In the streets of Vellore the war — if it was a real war — seemed as remote as something on another planet. In every block electronic posters burned energy from street level up to twenty stories high or higher, urging the people to smash Ungava, not to waste, not to talk loosely of military secrets, not to grumble about the rules. But all these exhortations seemed to Shenyang to be largely set at naught by the stores, full of good things to buy; the

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theaters and houses of entertainment, varied enough to suit any taste and any credit balance, doing a mass business; and by the people themselves.

The streets were full of folk who obviously enjoyed a wide choice of clothing and personal decoration and of vehicles in which to travel. They were busy, and they looked basically healthy and certainly well-fed. Just a touch glassy-eyed, perhaps — but Shen-yang saw that often enough at home, in the larger cities at any rate.

The people from the foreign ministry had a hotel room ready for him in one of the bigger and fancier inns on a main street of the capital. With the small bag of personal effects he had so far retained through thick and thin, he moved in, announcing a tiredness which certainly seemed likely enough under the circumstances, and was left alone. Five minutes later he moved right out again. In the first place, he was morally certain — although he had no technical means of proving it — that they had bugged his room. In the second place, he wanted to see just how his hosts would react. And in the third place, he wanted to make what free and unofficial contact he could manage with the citizens.

He left word at the desk of his departure and mentioned that he would call back, saying where he could be reached when he had picked himself another hotel. Reason for leaving, he gave none.

Apparently free of all restraint and even observation, he walked the crowded thoroughfares briefly, then settled himself in another hotel, chosen at whim from half a dozen that looked inviting. The men from the ministry had thoughtfully established electronic credit for him, and there was no problem about paying. The room he got this time was a lot smaller but looked just as comfortable. He left his bag in it and walked out again, to try a little mingling with the people.

Across the street, in the public bar of yet a third hotel, a young woman with a startlingly beautiful face gave him the eye so insistently that he decided to accept Fate again. Shortly she was walking with him back to his room.

When the door had closed behind them, he cleared his throat and said, "You may have heard this before."

"You're not a stickman," she opined, raising an eyebrow.

"If that means am I with the police, no, I'm not. I just meant that all I really want to do is talk."

In her face amusement began to struggle with other things and eventually prevailed. "As a matter of fact," she said at last, "that's all I really wanted to do myself."

He started to offer money, but she pantomimed it away, at which point he began to watch her very alertly.

She said, "Mr. Shen-yang ..." and paused there to let him appreciate the fact that she already knew his name. "I am sorry your trip was interrupted so

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unpleasantly but glad that you got to Lorenzoni in one piece. I represent what the rulers of Condamine call the Underground. Dirty Ungavan sympathizers."

"Ah. Are there many of you in Vellore?"

She waved aside the question, preferring to speak of something she considered more important. "If you go out again in the next hour — walk clear of Middle Street. It would be your most direct route from here to the foreign ministry, should you be going that way. But do not take it."

He nodded. "All right. But why?"

"Now I must go. They will soon be here to keep a watch on you again."

He nodded again.

When the door had closed behind the girl, it would have been easy to imagine that she had never been here.

He looked at his timepiece and sighed. His appointment at the foreign ministry was in just half an hour.

A quarter of an hour later, he was given the chance to show his diplomatic card again. When the Condamine police had looked at it and had talked quietly on their radios to some invisible authority, they saluted and let him go on his way at once, brushing the dust of the recent spinbomb blast from his new clothing and shaking his head in an effort to dispel the ringing ache that the explosion had installed immediately inboard from his right ear.

He assumed the thing had been a spinbomb because other kinds of explosives were now too easy to detect. He calculated that he must have been leaving his new hotel just about the time the nameless terrorist was setting down the bomb on Middle Street and quietly pulling its axis pin and walking on, colorless and invisible in the crowd. Shen-yang had just bypassed Middle Street and gone on around a corner when someone brushed the bomb in its no doubt innocent-looking container, or traffic shook the walk enough to make it wobble, and its tiny flywheels, counter-rotating inside their vacuum bottle with a rim speed equal to a substantial proportion of the velocity of light, disintegrated. If it had been a small nuke instead of a tiny spinner, Shen-yang supposed, the ministry three blocks away might have gone up with a sizable surrounding chunk of city, instead of a mere storefront or two. But certainly the police would have detected a nuke before it had been carried into the middle of the city.

The blast seemed to have made no great impression on the vast majority of the folk hurrying busily through the streets. No one who was not bleeding seemed to take it all that hard. It was evidently something that happened from time to time, like rain, and the business of getting and spending had to go on.

The foreign ministry was no bigger than a large house and tastefully ornate, set apart from the city around it

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only by a simple-looking fence and a narrow belt of lawn. There were uniformed guards at the door, keen-looking though they did not seem to be actually doing much. They gave Shen-yang and his card a simple looking over and courteously directed him on his way; if he underwent any other inspection, the means by which it was accomplished were imperceptible.

The elevator went down instead of up, down for almost twenty levels. Maybe, after all, a small nuke three blocks away would not have taken out the ministry's most important parts.

Only a little late, Shen-yang reached the proper office, where he had to wait about thirty seconds before being passed on in. His appointment was with Minister Hondurman himself, who came around his desk with hand outstretched to offer greetings. He was a large, dark man, very correctly dressed, with a handsome face beginning to go puffy.

One of the first things Shen-yang said was: "I bring you personal greetings from Director Nicobar — she regrets that urgent business kept her from coming herself."

"Yes ... we did know each other once, in school. How long ago that was ... but how is Dr. Nicobar?"

"In good health. Extremely busy. It sometimes seems that the whole galaxy is bringing the Peace Foundation jobs these days. We arbitrate, we investigate, we publish a great deal."

"I am well aware that great advantages can accrue from your endorsement. That was true even before we were cut off here."

"It is more true now, Minister Hondurman. We have more real power in the galaxy than do the governments of some small worlds. If, when we make our formal investigation of this war on Lorenzoni, we can report a reasonable settlement, it will in fact go a long way to help your government rejoin galactic society — which I understand you are eager to do." Hondurman was waiting silently, and Shen-yang went on: "Frankly, while the war continues, I don't see how any favorable report can be made."

The minister, unsurprised, nodded and took thought. Then he asked, "What did they tell you on Shearwater about the war?"

"Next to nothing. They expected I would be going directly from there to Ungava, and I suppose they thought the High Leader would prefer to present his own case."

"We can make travel arrangements with Ungava, if you still wish to go on and see him."

"Of course I do."

Hondurman nodded again and made a note to himself on the surface of his desk, which seemed constantly awash with electronic projections of one kind or another. "Believe me, Mr. Shen-yang." He coughed. "My government would like to end the war, when it can be done honorably and decently. We have not yet found a way."

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Shen-yang gestured disagreement. "Why not simply end the bombardment and the raids?"

"We have in fact several times suspended such activities. But Ungavan operations against us are out of our control, and while they persist, the war goes on. Did you hear the blast in the street not half an hour ago?"

"Very well; in fact I am still hearing it." He explained just how close he had been.

The other rose and came around the desk, concerned. "But you should have said something. Do you need medical attention?"

"I don't think so."

"My own physician is not far away. I wish you would allow me to call her."

"If you like, but later. Now, do these terrorist attacks really amount to a war waged against you? Do they compare to what your forces have done and are still doing to Ungava?"

Hondurman shrugged. "I'll show you some things. See if you think they add up to a war or not."

The charts and figures began to appear, like some conjurer's props, projected on walls, spewed in printape from the desk. They detailed Ungavan attacks on fishing vessels, on shipping, on mining and drilling operations in all the oceans of the world. Terrorist bombs in Condamine cities. Condamine aircraft (unarmed recon ships and transports, Hondurman claimed them to be) shot down. Hit-and-run raids by small forces against the Condamine coast. Ungavan atrocities in the planet's ministates, small societies trying to cling to independence and neutrality. More atrocities against any of the people dwelling in Ungava who cooperated in the least degree with Condamine. All in all, if it were true, it certainly added up to a lot of killing and a lot of damage. Not a hundred million dead, of course. Not the destruction of a great industrial society.

At last Shen-yang broke into the flow of data with a question. "How do you suppose they can keep going, making such a war effort as you describe? After attacks like those you have made and are still making?"

"Mr. Shen-yang, have you studied the history of strategic bombardment? It has never broken the will of any people to fight."

"Of course it has never before been applied quite so — thoroughly — has it? Minister Hondurman, I'd like to pass on for your comment some figures recently given the Peace Foundation by the first Ungavan envoy to the galaxy. They concern that first missile strike of yours."

The man across the desk nodded, poker-faced, and Shen-yang began to produce the data he had been carrying in his memory. How many missiles Condamine had delivered, without warning, in that first awesome blow. How many cities were roasted, how much land and water poisoned, how many tens of millions of the Ungavan

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people had died in the first ten minutes — and how many more in the next hour, the next day, the next year....

"Let us suppose," Hondurman interrupted coldly, "for the sake of argument, that all this is substantially correct. What is the point you wish to make from it?"

"Simply this. The war is effectively over. You won it a long time ago. How can that poor battered remnant of a people pose any real threat to you? Sure, as long as Shearwater supports them with material, they can burrow under the mountains, cling to life, to some kind of military organization. They can even carry on harassing operations against you. But what do you want of them before you will make peace?"

"It is not what we want of them, sir, but what they want of us. Peace talks have been convened many times — I really forget how many. Talks are presently suspended, as long as our present government remains in office. That is the latest Ungavan condition for resuming peace talks, sir, that we replace our government!"

"All right." Shen-yang could picture the fanatic Ungavan leaders — utter, bitter fanatics they must be by now, and one could hardly blame them — making such demands, in sheer all-out defiance. "But why do you really need a peace conference at all? Why not simply *stop*?"

"We could stop. But they would not. They would continue, a bombing here, a raid there. Sooner or later we would strike at them again." Hondurman made a curiously helpless gesture.

"Excuse me, sir, but I find that hard to believe. If you really let them know it was all over. Ceased building ICBMs or long-range cruise missiles. Offered them some reparations, which it would seem you can afford."

Hondurman was silent, listening attentively, and Shen-yang pressed on: "According to the Ungavans' figures, which I notice you don't deny, they can have very little left in the way of heavy industry and not a lot in the way of natural resources. I repeat, don't you think the war is really over?"

"They keep a war machine going," the minister answered stolidly. "They have great help from Shearwater, whose government is bitterly opposed to ours, for historical reasons which you may or may not —"

"I've read some of the history of your system."

"Good. However, an all-out interplanetary war remains unthinkable, in this system or elsewhere. There is simply too much —"

"I've read the theories on that, too. What I have never read anywhere is any reason for the Ungavans' fighting on if you stopped."

"Well — you will have to ask them about that, I suppose."

"I intend to."

"Excuse me, Mr. Shen-yang, you said a moment ago that you did not see what real threat they pose to us. Are

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you aware that they still have their own strategic missiles?"

A silence began to grow. Shen-yang fingered his aching right ear, wondering if it might have played him false. Then he understood, or thought he did. "You mean they are starting now to build some? Or to import some from Shearwater?"

"No. I mean that the Ungavans still have more than a thousand of their own ICBMs emplaced, mostly in hardened sites — have had them since before the war. Some have been knocked out by our missiles, of course. I am not at liberty to quote you our best intelligence estimates of how many remain — but a thousand would be a good, fair, round figure."

There was silence again. Shen-yang noticed that his chair squeaked if he rocked in it.

His ears were evidently working fine. Either something in his brain was badly askew, though, or something in this world. "Let me see if I understand. Your official claim is that Ungava still possesses a sizable strategic strike force, intact after more than forty years of pounding by nuclear missiles —"

"Excuse me." The minister leaned forward. "It is important that you understand, there has not been forty years of continuous pounding, as you call it. If we had built missiles and fired them as fast as we could for forty years, both we and the Ungavans would long since have perished from radiation poisoning, and there would be no world of Lorenzoni to fight about — no world that anyone could live on."

"I understand that," said Shen-yang stiffly. "I have some military experience."

"Ah? Very good. Proceed."

"You say they have a sizable strategic strike force, still intact. *But* in more than forty years of war, in which you have hit them again and again with similar weapons, they have never fired even one of these missiles at you."

"That is correct."

"Can you explain why?"

"They fear to tip the environmental balance. You see, it can be shown mathematically — or so my experts tell me — that the long-term effects of another mass launching of missiles will be worse for Ungava than for us, regardless of where the missiles land." Was there, in the minister's almost immobile face, a glint of some brand of humor? "Of course for a first-hand answer, you will have to ask the Ungavans themselves."

His trip began next day with a flight from Vellore to an advanced military base, set amid the chalky cliffs of the southern coast. The next leg of his journey passed aboard a fast courier-recon plane, which deposited him upon a barren ocean islet, then took off in a hurry, headed back the way it had come, and vanished in a moment.

Surf pounded tranquilizingly, but

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then some wild sea creature screamed as if in torment. Waiting on the flat, lichen-spotted rock, Shen-yang studied the horizon and tried to use the time for thought. He still could not believe in the existence of the Ungavan strategic missiles — those utter, bitter fanatics would have used them, sometime in the past forty years. Themselves held on the rack of war, year after year, by a merciless enemy — they would have struck back as hard as possible. No claim had ever been made that they were superhumanly forgiving, and it was unreasonable that they should be so reluctant to add some pollution to the atmosphere.

He could hear the Ungavan aircraft coming before he spotted it; it was moving somewhat more slowly than the Condamine courier. Shen-yang waved as the smooth metal shape made one leisurely pass overhead. He felt a little foolish for his wave when the aircraft had landed and he had walked to it and found it was unmanned.

A glassy canopy had retracted, above an empty, spartan seat and a small space for luggage. Shen-yang climbed in, and as his weight came down into the seat, the glass slid closed again above his head. A moment later he was airborne. The plane flew at a good speed, close above the waves. It turned smoothly a couple of times, avoiding a line of squalls.

In time a coastline grew, ahead. He thought his vehicle slowed somewhat as the land drew nearer — to give him a good look?

There, just inland among rocky hills, was ground-zero of some horrendous blast, a decade or more old. Glassy and sterile hectares were surrounded by the stumps of crags and recent, tender life in the form of scattered, stunted-looking greenery.

Farther from the central scar, the stumps of buildings, half-buried now in drifted sand, made a larger ring. This, then, had been a city, and probably a harbor. There were no signs that humans had ever tried to reoccupy the place.

He rode on. His homework-reading had informed him that the whole Ungavan continent was hardly more than one great, wide range of mountains. Between the barren peaks and crests, long valleys, some still fertile, twisted or ran nearly straight, marked here and there by narrow lakes. Now he could see people and machines working in some of the sheltered lowlands, tending or gathering crops. As his aircraft bore him through one valley at low altitude, he could see how some of the farmers looked up at his roaring passage, while others kept their attention on the earth. A few times he passed small buildings, never large enough to house the numbers of people he beheld.

The landing strip, he saw upon approaching it, looked like a plowed field too — no, it *was* a plowed field. Whatever his craft put down in the way of

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landing gear engaged the shallow furrows neatly, and the landing felt pleasantly slow and safe, if not exactly smooth.

His canopy slid back. People in drab, ill-fitting uniforms were all around him, smiling, most of them talking at the same time in accents newly strange to Shen-yang's ears. His ride had come to a stop under cover of a great tree. He was being helped out, and in a moment he was standing within a chest-high revetment between great rocks decorated with twin portraits of the High Leader. Leafy branches made a visually impenetrable cover overhead and hung on all sides in a shaggy veil. Welcome clamored on all sides, and there was no counting the hands held out for him to shake. The general impression was of youth, eagerness, and energy.

When a girl handed him a hot drink and some simple food, Shen-yang noticed what he thought were radiation keloids on her arm and side. He thought the scars were not boldly enough undraped to be meant for intentional display. He supposed the whole countryside must be chronically hot. Well, before leaving home he had taken what medical steps he could in the way of radiation prophylaxis for himself.

They led him to a car, a mass of twenty or more people all enthusing at the same time about the rare privilege that he was being granted. The privilege was a talk with the High Leader himself; the young folk dropped their envious voices to a whisper whenever they mentioned that old man by his title or his name.

Four or five got into the car with him, and they were off. The road twisted and turned, seemed to be inside a tunnel as often as not, but still gave him a good chance to see the countryside. Not that there was anything much different from what he had already seen. Blast-marks, crops, workers, rocky hills. Here and there the entrance to some other tunnel, enigmatically unmarked. Once an organized gaggle of children pelted the speeding car with flowers and waved more pictures of the leader at it. The pictures and the flowers and some of the growing crops possessed the only bright colors to be seen below the sky. Everyone wore drab, and everyone looked busy.

He was taken to the High Leader at once, and, despite all the awed foreshadowing, with practically no ceremony. He found that old man waiting for him in a simply furnished cave, a great chamber beneath an immensely beetling brow of limestone and about one third open to the air.

There were two simple chairs and one small table in the cave, and a cluster of cables passing crudely through it at the back. Shen-yang found himself left alone there with a toughly stout and greatly aged man, whose long white sideburns, a personal trademark, looked exactly as they did

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in all the pictures. What the pictures could not show was in the eyes.

They were seated, Shen-yang at a little distance from the old man and his table, upon which he seemed to like to rest his calloused, age-grooved hands, as if it were a lectern.

"And did you have a pleasant journey across the ocean?"

"Pleasant enough. I marvel at how well your air service runs. It must be difficult to keep it going."

The old man appeared pleased. "Mr. Shen-yang, there is really no secret to how we keep things going. We rely not upon our machines but upon our people. That is why we shall win this war in the end."

Shen-yang thought to himself that had his aircraft failed in midflight, no mass of a hundred or a million peasants rushing out to catch him in their arms would have helped in the least. So, on a surface level, what the old man had just said was nonsense. But Shen-yang thought that there were other levels in the statement, and in those other levels somewhere there was truth.

Still, he was not going to let it pass unchallenged. "You do have machines, though, and to some extent you do depend upon them."

"We use complex machinery when it is available and when it suits our plans. We do not use it when it is not suitable; therefore we do not need it, and our victory does not depend upon it."

If this old man, thought Shen-yang, tells me that this mountain we are under will turn to jelly in the next minute, my mouth will fall open with surprise when it does not. Dare I — *can* I — say to *this* man that the war is over?

The leader, after a courteous pause, was going on. "The enemy, on the contrary, has all along relied upon machines to crush us. That is why he must fail in the end."

"Your losses no doubt have been terrible."

"They have been great. I myself have walked for a kilometer on the dead bodies of my people, because there was no space between dead bodies to put down one's feet. That was after the blast and firestorm at Kinjanchunga. But it is not huge losses that sap a people's will." Whatever words the old man said seemed to come out of his mouth engraved upon eternal slabs of granite. "What saps their will is a too-great concern with things that do not matter."

Shen-yang hitched his hard chair a little closer. "What matters —" he began and had a thought in mind that he could never afterwards recall because it was melted in a vast disruption of the world. A blue-white welder's torch came on to seal the sky, with one electric flick, across the entrance to the cave, and Shen-yang had a mad and trivial thought *I didn't mean it about the jelly*, and then the whole mountain made a fist and struck him in the mouth.

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His chin was bleeding. Both of his ears now rang numbly. What sound had just come and gone was already as far beyond memory as it had been beyond hearing in its passage. He got up from where he found himself on hands and knees on the smooth cave floor and saw the High Leader, a fussy housekeeper, setting up his small table and his own old chair again. If the leader had been in the least damaged, or even excited by the blast, he did not show it.

With commotion, there were suddenly a dozen, a score, of frightened men's and women's faces looking in around one rocky corner and another. Not one looked for a moment at Shen-yang, but he was free to study them — the faces of people who had briefly felt their souls in peril but who were once more convinced of their salvation when they saw their God was still alive, unhurt, and with His people.

The old man had a sharp, practical-sounding question or two for them, in the local tongue, which Shen-yang could not follow. Answers were received and orders issued. The people as they turned away now looked elated by this new challenge.

Turning back to his guest, the old man addressed him once more in their common tongue. "More missiles may be on their way. It seems the Condaminers have tagged you with a tracer of some kind for them to home on, something our own search devices failed to detect, planted on you, your clothing, or perhaps your luggage. Doubtless they calculated that you would be having a talk with me shortly after your arrival here. To kill me, they will spare no effort." He turned toward the rear of the cave, gesturing Shen-yang to follow. "Their superior technology, you see. And you see that again it avails them nothing."

Around a fold of rock, an aide was standing by an open door. A moment later the three of them were descending in an elevator, which looked as neat as anything in Hondurman's foreign ministry.

"Here we will be safer." After the old man had said that, no missile in the world would dare to touch them.

When they got out of the elevator at its lowest level, Shen-yang looked about him, at the size and shape of the place in which he found himself, at the instruments ranked below the clock and the leader's portrait, at the texture of the walls that spoke to an expert eye of super-toughness.

The leader looked at him, started to say something, and then waited, bright eyes probing.

"This is what we used to call a technicians' bay," Shen-yang announced in a slow voice. "And — through that door — there will be an intercontinental ballistic missile waiting in its silo."

His host made a grave gesture of assent.

"You have them, then," said Shen-yang. "Do you really have a thousand?"

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Again, the confirmation.

"Then, all this time ... why didn't you fire them when you could?"

"When I could, Mr. Shen-yang?" The leader's face shivered into a thousand wrinkles, became that of a smiling, wise old demon. And he raised, on a chain that hung around his neck, the carven symbol of his party and his faith. Shen-yang could see the tiny studs projecting from it, coded secretly no doubt, so that one man alone possessed the power, day or night, to....

"When I could? There is nothing to prevent my firing them now — more than eleven hundred strategic missiles. But I chose not to fire, forty-six years ago. And as of this moment, that is still my choice."

Shen-yang felt more dazed by those absent blasts than by the real ones he had endured. "To — to save the atmosphere —?"

The old man smiled. "No, we can survive that, too, if need be. Our people's medicine is working on the problems and will solve them. Besides, already only the resistant ones of us are left. No, we have another reason for not launching.

"Our greatness is born of great adversity and nurtured on it. When we have blown away the Condaminers' cities and more than half their lives, what is left of them will be stronger and harder to defeat than they are now. Why, Mr. Shen-yang, should I so strengthen my foe? Their leaders, in their hearts, would be delighted if I did."

Shen-yang thought of Vellore, indefensibly open to the sky, to cruise missile and MIRV, to laser-reflecting warheads. He thought of the buried, hardened nerve centers and wondered if Hondurman himself ever came up above the ground.

I want to go home, thought Shen-yang, with a physical revulsion for this place so strong he almost started for the elevator. *Away from this world of madmen.*

The aide was approaching, a bright red wireless communicator of some kind in his hand. The old man took it with a nod and said into it at once: "Do you call now to see if I am still alive?" Even as he spoke, there came another godlike blast far above; the living rock around them shook and trickled powder. "Of course I am alive. How can you slay a man, who is an idea first of all, with a machine?"

A few more words were exchanged. Then the fleshy old arm held out the device to Shen-yang. "There is someone who wishes a few words with you."

When he held the thing for his own use, Hondurman's face was visible in its little screen, and Hondurman's voice came through. "My government's deepest apologies, Mr. Shen-yang, if any military action of ours has in fact endangered you. Of course you knew that you were entering a combat zone —"

"I'm still alive," he interrupted. "By the way, you were right about the missiles here."

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A slight bow was visible. "It appears that you too were right, all along. Our Council of Ministers has just been reorganized, and it now agrees to the Ungavan conditions for peace talks to resume. Our new government deplores the latest launchings, disclaims responsibility for them, and will take disciplinary action against the officers responsible. Our official position is that the war is essentially over and the situation must be normalized before our world rejoins the galaxy."

"I was right about its being over, yes. But wrong about one other thing." Shen-yang paused. "So, you're changing leaders to get the peace talks going? That's what losers do, you know."

The eyes in the small screen were haunted. "And just what else, sir, did you suppose we were?"

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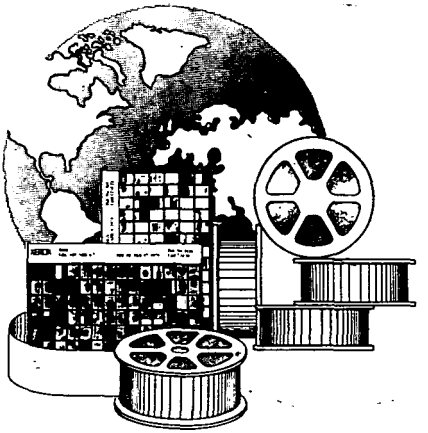

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Films

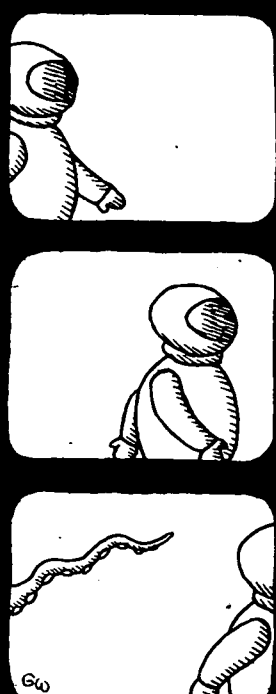
BAIRD SEARLES

THE ICE CAP COMETH

Fade in on an endless, blinding snowscape. Stretching across it is a futuristic train, almost invisible in drifts. Two tiny figures struggle in the snow behind the train, making their way through the featureless terrain. We see them more closely; they are garbed in an odd way; neo-Lapp seems the only description, bulky swathings of neutral-colored, homespun cloth, artfully draped.

The smaller figure in the towering cloth headdress resembles an Old Testament patriarch, but on closer view turns out to be a plump cheeked girl. Her companion, in a fur cap, looks very much like Paul Newman.....

I've had occasion to review one Robert Altman film in this space some years back, the madcap *Brewster McCloud*, which still enchants me when I see it rerun on TV. Of all the emergent directors of the past decade, Altman interests me the most. I haven't seen all his output; I haven't liked everything I've seen. But from the grittily realistic *McCabe and Mrs. Miller* (which portrayed a turn-of-the-century lumber camp so accurately that you know this is the way it was) to the murkily pretentious *Three Women* (a description a lot of people disagree with me on), there is always a quirky intelligence going. Even in the unsuccessful films, there's always something funny and/or



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memorable (Shelley Duvall's endless tuna melts in *Three Women*).

So when Altman makes a science fiction film, I, for one, sit up and take notice.

Quintet is not a totally successful movie; it *is* successful science fiction, however. You are given no information as to the time and place in which it is set; a guess would be the next century after the onset of an ice age which has set in maybe a generation before. The iced-in cities (or city — only one is seen) support a minimal population with enough looted wood to provide heat, enough food to keep them going.

Newman and his companion return to the city after years spent in the South hunting seals, which have recently all disappeared. She is the daughter of a now-dead hunting companion; she is also pregnant, a source of joy and wonder to the city's people — there have been no births there for a long time. And to enhance the sense of moribundity, a persistent visual theme is that of dogs devouring human corpses.

Through the more-or-less operative computer of the city (which was of "five sectors and sixteen levels"), Newman finds his brother. Leaving the girl with him and his family, Newman goes to buy wood. All in the brother's crowded room are killed while he is gone.

Since this is, among other things, a sort of murder mystery, I can say no more. I can only obliquely reveal that the inhabitants of this dying metropolis are addicted to a board game called quintet ("The game is the only thing of value" says the referee who, in effect, rules the city) and that *The 10th Victim* comes to mind.

Those hints are not unfair, I think, because much of the film's beginning is obscure, not to mention slow. Against these negatives is the virtue of a beautifully created and filmed ambience, which is why it is so successful as science fiction.

The details of this permafrost-bitten milieu have been worked out very nicely indeed. I have mentioned the costumes, which are what exotic costuming should be — believable and handsome.

On the sound track periodically is the roar of the glaciers, cracking and thundering their way across the landscape (another detail never explained; much of the audience will be wondering about the off-screen artillery battle).

The ice-covered city of the future is beautifully evoked. (A light bulb is turned on — the ice on it slowly drips off.) After about 20 minutes, I had one of those major shocks of recognition and suddenly realized the inspired setting where the movie was filmed — in what are now the ruins of Montreal's Expo '67. It works; it really works. It was obviously filmed last winter (you remember what last winter was like); one of those tiny details that adds reality is that you can almost always see

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the actors' breaths. *Quintet* is as successfully realistic in a future tense as *McCabe* was in a past.

Paul Newman's presence certainly adds cachet to *Quintet;* he is looking more and more like the flip side of a buffalo nickel. Brigitte Fossey (the memorable child from *Forbidden Games*) and Bibi Andersson are fine as the pregnant girl and the love-hate interest.

Despite its flaws, *Quintet* is much worth seeing. Altman can take his place with Lucas and Kubrick as a major mainstream director who has made an intelligent and interesting science fiction movie.

Speaking of the mainstream, I was a little taken aback at the number of mainstream critics who adored the new *Invasion of the Body Snatchers.* (See last month's column for my non-adoring opinion.) After a moment of wondering if they'd seen the same movie I had, the reasoning suddenly occurred to me.

Most of the non-science-fiction-reading public still thinks of the science fiction film as a variation on the horror-thriller genre. If it vaguely works on that level and perhaps has some sort of pretention to Message (usually the hackneyed one about the endangerment of individuality), there's no reason it should have to make sense or be logical ("Oh, it's just science fiction. Anything's possible"), and it certainly needn't be judged by the standards one judges *serious* movies by.

(That's why *2001* made such hash of the critics. Never have you seen so many negative reviews recanted in movie reviewerdom.)

On the other hand, serious science fiction readers know of the scope and potential of the field, and that it's outgrown its "fun thriller" limitations (not that *good* fun — *Star Wars, Dr. Who* — isn't always welcome).

So that's why there's cause for rejoicing when an intelligent s/f film is made, such as *Quintet.* And that's why it will probably be panned by the critics. It's not what a *real* science fiction film, like *Body Snatchers,* should be.

Robert A. Heinlein's "All You Zombies," Damon Knight's "Not With A Bang" and Alfred Bester's "Fondly Fahrenheit" are just three of the stories that will be included in F¡SF's 320-page, 30th anniversary October 1979 issue. Send us immediately the coupon on page 55 to be sure of receiving this collector's items.

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Nick O'Donohoe writes: "I was born and raised in New Hampton, Iowa; presently I'm doing my Ph.D. in Humanities at Syracuse. I sing second tenor, play guitar and piano, and play penny-ante poker, all with no profit and great enjoyment. This is my first sale."

To Dust You Will Return

BY

NICK O'DONOHOE

That was the summer that Grandpapa was dying. Who doubted it? Everyone in the neighborhood knew and crossed themselves whenever it thundered from clear skies or a dog howled and no one could see it. "Old Duvallo is dying," they would mutter, "and half his soul will wander forever wailing if he dies this far from the Island."

Well, no, not everyone. Not half, in fact. The older ones only, I guess, and the ones under five were afraid; but the ones in between, too old to feel and too young to believe, they weren't afraid. Mrs. Herencia-down-the-street wiggled her fat old fingers at my sister Lisetta and me; she said the in-betweeners, they thought they were too smart to pray, so they were too foolish to fear evil. I listened and felt my eyes go big and round like American quarters or like Arturo-gato's when he stalks a fat pigeon. I thought I'd go to church even on a week night, maybe, sometime.

Lisetta wasn't scared at all. She never was, of Grandpapa or anything about him. She tossed her big dark curls that I wanted so bad, and said, *"No es la verdad.* Grandpapa won't walk the earth, and he won't cry for the Island. All he'll do is die, and we'll bury him here in New York, and then all he'll do is rot like he's doing anyway." And I kicked her, pretty and older sister and all, because it was so horrible to say Grandpapa was rotting, even if it was true.

Nobody knew it was true better than I did. How could I not, sitting there listening to him, smelling his leg all through hot July days? Lisetta and Rosali didn't do it; they were too busy with the boys, playing sit-in-our-parlor when everyone was home and

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don't-tell-Papa when nobody was. Poor Mama couldn't do it; the first time she tried to change the bandage over the place the dirty glass had cut him, she turned so white that Grandpapa patted her hand and joked she'd have to move to a white Manhattan neighborhood and be rich. So that was that. And Papa wouldn't do it, not ever.

Papa was afraid of Grandpapa. Sometimes I think Papa believed all they said about Grandpapa, even though Papa said it was all *mentiras*, lies. I never saw Papa look in the room unless Grandpapa looked asleep; then Grandpapa would turn his big-boned thin face toward the door, and even with the curtains shut his eyes would be the darkest things in the room. And they stared blackness all over Papa, and he would close the door and turn on all the lights and sit in the raggedy armchair, mumbling to himself.

Papa was upset because as long as Grandpapa lived, Papa was shamed by Ernesto, Papa's best friend. Ernesto bragged that he, Ernesto, could strike his wife Julia whenever she shouted at him. It wasn't fair; my Mama was gentle and quiet and would never yell at Papa, but I guess it hurt him to know he didn't dare hit her even if she did. He had once, long ago, and Grandpapa roared at him and went out and bought things and did things with them. And Papa screamed in his sleep for three nights until Mama came to Grandpapa on her knees and begged him to stop. He and Papa barely spoke to each other after that.

So when Grandpapa was dying, I was the only one around him. He wouldn't let a doctor near him after one said he had gangrene and they'd have to take his leg off. Grandpapa said he would fight the rotten death his own way, and he did for a month and a half. I tried to help him.

He helped me just as much; if I was the only one who listened to him, he was the only one I came to crying. I'd come in calmly and quietly and close the door, those hot days, then I'd throw myself down by his shoulder and I'd howl. Grandpapa would stretch his bony, strong arm around me and hug me as strong and secure as the three locks on the front door, and he'd shout, "Someone has hurt my little Luisa again! I will send him on fire through the streets. I will turn him white and make his own brother cut him apart. I will burn out Jamaica block by block to find him, if I have to chase him all the way to the rich people's buildings in Manhattan. All this, because someone has hurt my little Luisa."

And I would laugh and only cry a little then and say no, it wasn't that important, and he'd grumble, "To me it is." And then I'd tell him. And he'd listen — not patiently, waiting for me to finish, but impatient, angry, wanting to know more and build his anger. "Fire devils will weep melted lead in the streets! Windows will fall like snow

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flakes, dust devils will dance in empty buildings! I will eat men's hearts in alleys!"

Then he'd be calm and say, "But why do you care if he only comes to see Lisetta? You know he's a fool. From all the way in here, I hear him tell her he fails Spanish. Spanish!" His eyebrows would leap up and down like two black Arturos, chasing fat mice.

"But that's not fair," I'd say. "They all fail Spanish; the teacher wants Spanish Spanish, not Island Spanish."

"Then let her go to Spain." And we'd both laugh, and I'd feel better.

Sometimes afterward he'd play with my hair and say sadly, "Luisa, why is it they never see how pretty you are on the inside, where beauty comes from? If I were young and rich, I'd take you to the Island where we could dance on the beaches, and all the young men would watch you move, and they'd burn all night for you, feeling their arms so empty."

That was what I liked best, because then he'd show me the Island. I could watch in the room's dark corners as he talked, and I'd see the shadows dance into shapes of things he spoke about. There would be palm trees by the dresser and birds flying out of their leaves and waves beating against the chairs, with light holes in the waves to show where the moonlight sparkled. And pretty women would come out between the trees and dance with strong dark men on the beach between the dresser and the chair, and I would watch and watch till Grandpapa shut his eyes and they were all gone. Then he would say, "I will go back."

He made me promise not to tell anyone, but who would I tell? The girls would say I was crazy and young, and their boys would say I was crazy and plain. So I kept it a secret for me and Grandpapa to share. Those days there was nothing so beautiful for me, nothing so lovely.

Then the end of July came, and it got hotter. Lisetta and Rosali and I would watch others playing in the hydrants, and we'd wish Mama would leave so we could. The sky was full of heat lightning by night and thunder by day, and no clouds either time. Everyone was nervous and the air was strange. An orchid grew out a building wall and bloomed and withered before anyone could pick it. There were dust devils whirling in the streets even when there was no wind. Then one afternoon an owl beat itself to death against our front window, and I knew that Grandpapa was dying.

When I came into his room I could smell death, even stronger than the smell of his leg. For the first time, his eyes showed how hard it was, lying here and thinking the bad blood from coming any further up his leg. He turned toward the door.

"So, little Luisa." He tried to smile. "You know." I nodded. "Then I must tell you: I want death, but not here. I do not fear dying, but that it will come too soon. I am like the shadows cast in

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this room, from the trees on the Island; only the part you see is here, most of me is back on the Island. I cannot die cut off from the rest of me." He stopped and turned his leg in his hands. Tears of pain came to his eyes, and he wiped them out angrily.

"Why did you ever leave it?"

"It is a part of me I had to give up to be — what I am. I can go back to it and die whole; without it I will be worse than a shadow. Does this answer you?"

"I mean why did you leave the Island?"

He shrugged. "The family was leaving; it seemed like a good idea, then." He looked down across his narrow, rough nose at his leg, and frowned. "I did not expect this. This," and he pointed at the stained bandages, "was a bad idea."

I was afraid for him. "Grandpapa, whatever I can do to send you back, I will. Is there anything I can do?"

He smiled proudly. "There is one thing, and I know it will be done." It was the one time I saw him small and gentle and not a thing of power. "My Luisa will help me."

Then he told me the list of things: two to be bought or taken, one to be stolen, one to be found, and one asked for. I promised I would get them and ran out from the death smell.

I went to the butcher first, for the things bought. The chicken he didn't want to give me without dressing it, but I said I wanted it that way and paid extra. The beef heart was easy. I used the money I'd been saving from my school lunch money, to get a church dress that made me as pretty as Lisetta and Rosali. I hated to see the money go, but what was a dress compared to Grandpapa?

On the way back I stopped at the grocer's and took one banana without paying. I was ashamed to, but I needed one stolen thing, and it was easiest and cheapest. I hid it in the butcher bag and asked the grocer if I could look at boxes in the back.

I checked the banana boxes for the found thing. It was easy to find him, since they come up on boxes all the time, but still I jumped when he leapt at my foot. I slammed my purse over him and got almost all of him in one try; just one hairy brown leg kicked crazy out from under my purse. I shifted it and tried not to think of him pulling his eight legs under him, waiting to spring. I tapped the bottom and felt the slap as he struck at the lining. I closed the purse quickly and went home.

The last thing, the thing asked for, was easiest to get in a family of three girls plus Mama, but hardest to ask for. I knew I could get it from Rosali; in two days she had fought with Tomas, yelled at Mama, and burst into tears when Papa teased her.

When I came to her room with a jar and asked, she thought I was crazy or bad, or something. I told her Grandpapa needed it, and still she wouldn't. She finally said yes when I said I'd give

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her the side combs made of real *tortuga*, the ones Mama had quit wearing because Papa called her turtle head and said married women didn't wear such things. Rosali took the jar and went into the bathroom and came back holding the jar and making a face. I took it and ran back to Grandpapa's room, where I'd put the other things.

There wasn't much to the rest; I guess the hard part was just getting the things. I took a small pan and put the soft chicken insides in it, then added the beef heart, split into four parts with a silver dime in each part. I put in the banana, then slapped my purse against the floor hard and added what was in there. I heated the whole thing over a candle flame. It smelled very bad, but it was summer and the neighbors were used to strange cooking smells.

I took the pan and poured a little into it from the jar. I asked why he needed it, because I thought you only put it in the mixes for love. He laughed and said, "Even if the one I call serves me, he will do it better if he loves me just a little."

I handed him the pan, burning my fingers. He ate just a little from it, not noticing the heat, and muttered with a dry voice, the voice that made my hair stand on end and sparks jump from the candlesticks by his bed. The pan started to sing, a little like a bell and a little like a woman, and a little like fire and bees.

The shadows on the walls all moved now, not just in the corners, but on the walls and the floor and even across the bed. There were palms and vines, and cockatoos and sea birds; the waves splashed on the rug and were full of fish. And a lot of men, or things like them, danced around the bed, waving palm branches and carrying something that looked like a man only too empty — a shadow of a shadow.

Sand rattled on the window, and Grandpapa said, "Open it," only he couldn't have, because he never stopped chanting. I opened it and smelled the salt. Twigs flew in my hair, and they smelled strange, and the wind was rich, dew-filled and hot. The room smelled of rain and strange flowers, and the wind blew past me.

The steam from the pan mixed with the dust and whirled around Grandpapa. All the shadow people raised their arms and shouted, but I couldn't hear anything. The shadow palms all bent down as a giant shadow-wave crashed all the way over the bed.

Grandpapa jerked once, his whole body flying up in the air and falling down limp. His eyes were open, but they didn't move at all, and he wasn't gasping anymore. The shadows vanished.

But a new shadow moved out of the room, pulled by the dust devil that smelled of the sea. It was the shape of a young man, about Grandpapa's height, and it bowed to me as it drifted out the window. I ran over and looked out; I saw the big dust devil roll south down the street, towards the ocean. I

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blinked — for a minute, it had a head and arms. All the other little whirlwinds followed it to the street's end, then scattered in all directions.

We held the funeral next Monday. I was the only one besides Mama that cried. Lisetta and Rosali wore new funeral dresses, and all the men but the altar boys smiled at them. Mama was crying, but not for Grandpapa. She had a big black eye you could see even through the veil, and Papa was standing very straight and proud.

A lot of people came to see the funeral, and when Grandpapa's coffin was finally in the grave, most of them nodded and went away. Two or three people stayed until he was buried and hung garlic strings on the tombstone. The priest wouldn't let me take the strings off, but I didn't think it mattered. Grandpapa wasn't there, not the part that mattered.

We all got used to his being gone. I got his room, even though Rosali wanted it. The house felt bigger, and I had a place to go when I wanted to be alone.

But I wasn't lonely after that, not for long. Grandpapa had showed me about the *cosas sombrosas* — the shadow-things. I called for one the day Mrs. Herencia-down-the-street's boy Joey got beaten by Esteban, who was older and bigger and shouldn't have done it. I like Joey, and I went out again, only this time I bought the banana and stole the chicken.

I had saved *sangre* from my last time and put a lot more in the pan than I had for Grandpapa. I was afraid, because I wasn't him; I wanted the shadow to love me a lot. I only put a little to my lips, but it tasted very, very bad. As soon as I had, though, something wiped my lips clean.

It was one of the dust-things, but he looked more like a man than before. He knelt beside me as I told him what to do.

For Grandpapa they did what he said right away; maybe they were afraid of him. But this one stayed, and he argued, and he begged, and he said he would do anything I asked ever, if I would only let him do with me some of the things Rosali and Lisetta each did with the boys. He said he loved me. And when I said no, he tried to cry but couldn't because so much of him was dust. And then he embraced me.

I still wouldn't have let him, even though I wanted Esteban punished. But he said I was beautiful. Not even Grandpapa ever said that.

We didn't do too much because he said he might hurt me or frighten me with so much so soon. And afterwards I cried, but I was happy, and he held me and swore he loved me more than anyone.

So Esteban got a broken arm and was afraid to go out at night for a month, and Mrs. Herencia-down-the-street said it was a punishment and bought two candles for the Madonna, but I didn't say anything.

And now Papa has stopped hitting

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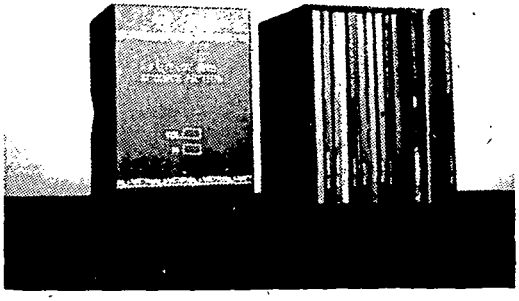
Mama again, and people come to me with their troubles because I'm not scary like Grandpapa was, and they bring money and presents. So I can buy nice dresses, and I go around the apartment all day smiling and humming, and Lisetta and Rosali are jealous because if their boy friends came to *their* room ever while Papa was home, Papa would beat Rosali and Lisetta. And my Shadow has sworn he will never leave me, and he will make his friends help me too, until I have more servants than even Grandpapa ever had.

And all this time we have known each other and been close, and he still says I am beautiful. No one has ever said that. And he says when I come to die he will take me to his home. It doesn't sound so nice as the Island, but he will be there with me. It cannot be so bad as it sounds.



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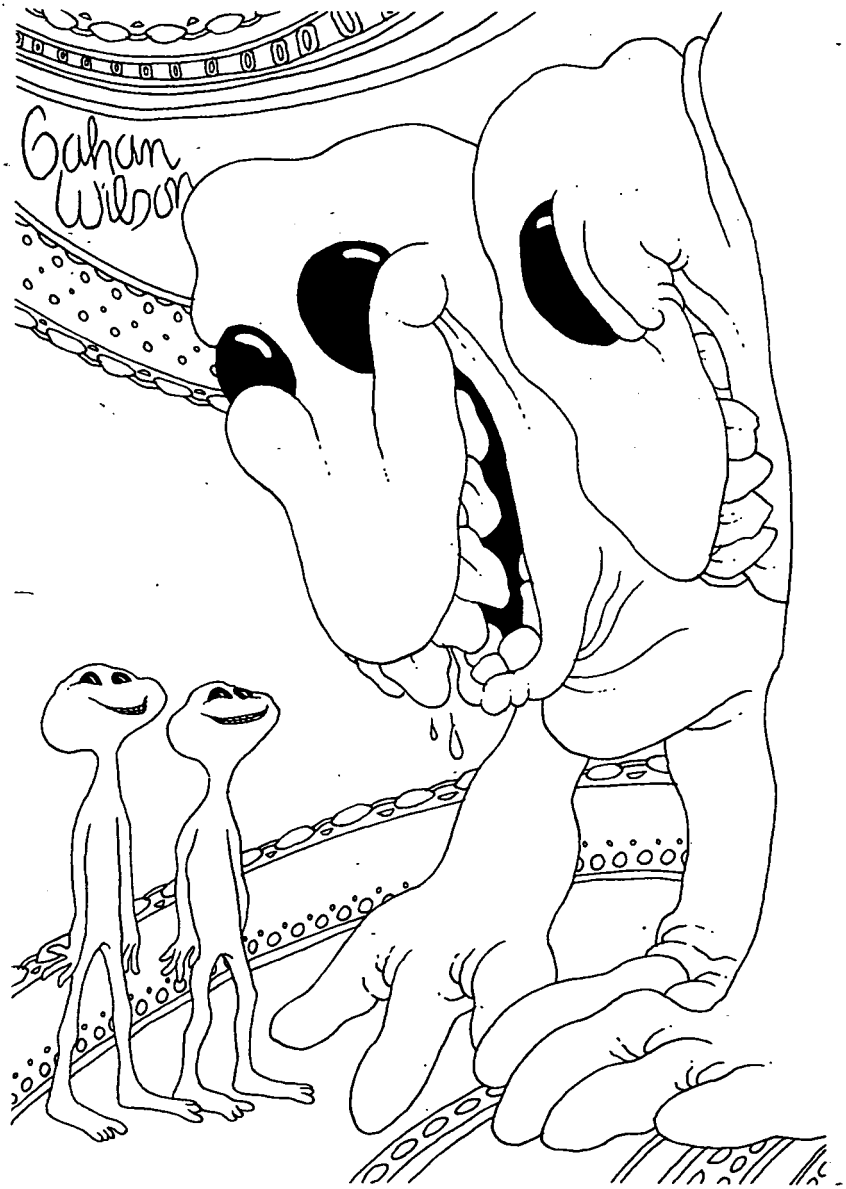

"OK, kids, ask the Earthlings in!"

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Here is a story full of tension, threat and violent combat. The battleground is a school.

No More Pencils, No More Books

BY

JOHN MORRESSY

It wasn't first-timer's shakes. Colby was long past that. All the same, he felt the lightness in his belly and the tightness in his throat, and the creeping feeling that everyone else in the car knew just where he was going on this gloomy Monday Morning.

He leaned back, took a deep breath, and directed his gaze out the window of the silent, rocking train, trying to keep his nerves calm. They were well into the city now, speeding along behind the protective fence, just above ground level. Colby's eyes flicked automatically from burned-out window to window, from one rubble heap to the next, searching out danger signs. He saw nothing. The light rain was falling steadily, and he guessed that the rubble rats had stayed in shelter. They'll all be in school today, keeping dry, he thought. Just my luck.

The train climbed, moved smoothly along, safely above roof level for the next two miles, then slowed for the main transfer point. Colby took his bag and moved out with the others, not too fast and not too slow, trying to damp his rising excitement.

Even at this early hour, most of the passengers were heading for the eight-car Business District and Midtown shuttles, where there were almost as many guards as riders. Colby headed for the special shuttle marked Inner City No. 3. The gateman checked his identification, took a quick look in his bag, and passed him through without a word. The inside guard gave Colby a just-perceptible smile and said, "Good luck, buddy."

"Thanks," Colby replied. His voice was hoarse, but he did not want to clear his throat in the guard's hearing.

The shuttle was a small electric with seats for twelve. It carried no

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guard. Colby was alone in it for a few minutes before a tall husky man entered and took the seat behind him. The newcomer gave Colby a quick glance but said nothing. Two more men entered. They stretched out as comfortably as the seats permitted, folded their arms, and went to sleep. Colby tried to do the same. He could not sleep. He kept thinking of the school at Greenbelt, where he could be right now. It was not too late; they would still have to take him back.

This was a bad way to be thinking, he knew. A man made his decisions and then he stuck with them. The move to Inner City No. 3 was a free choice, made with full knowledge of the gains and losses entailed. A little tougher, perhaps, especially in the beginning, but he'd been trained for it. And, here, he could count on support. There was nothing to worry about.

With nine men aboard, the shuttle pulled out of the station, down the ramp to the street. The ride was silent and surprisingly smooth. At one bumpy stretch Colby took a quick look outside and saw a pile of burned-out cars, real old-style gassers, in a tumbled roadside heap. They had probably been set up as a barrier during the night and thrust aside by an early patrol. He closed his eyes again. A loud thump brought him upright as something heavy crashed on the roof of the shuttle. None of the others stirred. He leaned back, shut his eyes, and kept them shut until the ride was over.

He was feeling better, more confident, when the shuttle pulled into the learning compound. The others filed out, mumbling a word now and then but generally silent, and he trailed along. At the first checkpoint he was given a locker number and sent down a short corridor. He changed quickly, relieved himself, and drank two glasses of water to moisten his throat.

A wiry little man entered the locker room and called Colby's name. When Colby replied, the man approached and held out his hand.

"I'm Ed Mills. I'm the assistant principal here," he said.

"Glad to meet you, Mr. Mills."

"Sorry I wasn't able to get together with you sooner, Colby. Things have been hectic here. If you have any questions about routine or schedules, or any of the operations, I'll try to answer them. Any questions at all, I'm here to help."

"Mr. Oakland explained things pretty well, sir. I've read all the orientation material he gave me. I've memorized the ground plan and the schedules."

"That's good. And you're familiar with the monitor we use?"

"I've logged sixty hours on the M-6 and eighty hours on the M-6A, sir."

"Good, good," Mills said, obviously pleased. "I have to remember that I'm dealing with an experienced teacher."

"This is my first Inner City hitch, sir."

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"It's not as bad as some people like to make it sound. We've got a tight ship here, Colby, and a good crew. You'll meet them later. Now, do you have any questions? The kids will be finished breakfast and morning medication in five minutes. You'd better be in place when they get out."

"No questions, sir. I'll head for my room."

"Remember one thing, Colby, and you'll be all right. Once you're behind that monitor, you're the boss. Never forget it, and never let them forget it. If something has to be done, do it. We'll back you up." Mills extended his hand once again. "Good luck, Colby."

Colby settled into place behind his monitor. Everything he needed to run a class was there at his fingertips, all the information before his eyes. He set the classroom lights high, dimmed his own, turned on the speakers, and waited for his class to enter. At precisely 8:30 the access door slid back and they began to saunter in. A few stared at him, others elaborately ignored him. The PSMs shuffled unaware to their places. When every student was at his proper console, still half asleep and sluggish from breakfast and his medication, Colby switched on the morning sports readout. The class settled down, and the room was quiet.

Second and third periods went by without an incident. Inner City wasn't supposed to be this quiet, Colby knew. He began to wonder what was going on. Perhaps one of the pill men had taken pity on the new teacher and overdosed everyone. He had heard of that being done. Or maybe the kids had a surprise planned for him.

The morning continued to go so well that Colby let his vigilance slip. He made the mistake of keeping his eyes on the monitor screen for too long. When he looked up, a fist was coming straight for his face.

He didn't flinch. He had been warned of this trick. The fist slammed into the plexine barrier and slowed, impact absorbed harmlessly. It stopped six inches from Colby's face. The kid looked at him with eyes cold as stones.

Colby stayed cool. He let the kid curse him out for a few seconds; then he cut the incoming speaker and let the kid stand there working his mouth without a sound coming through to the teacher's side.

That was a point for Colby. When he turned the speaker on again, he found that some of the others in the classroom were applauding, whistling, and stamping their feet to show approval. One of the PSMs struggled to his feet and went into a slow lurching dance. A kid in the front row began to spar playfully with the one who had thrown the punch at Colby.

Colby let them go on for a time to work off some of the morning's pent-up energy. So far, no harm was being done. But the playful mood did not last

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long. When he saw knives, Colby knew that things had gone far enough. He hit two switches, fast. His amplified voice boomed into the room, cutting through the uproar.

"I'm locked on both of you. You use the knives, I use the stinger," he said.

The kids studied each other and then him. Colby kept his finger lightly resting on the white button. Slowly, with the greatest disdain they could pack into each movement, they put away the knives. They slouched to their places and slumped into the consoles.

Colby ran a quick readout of names. One thing he had learned was to get the names of the troublemakers right away. The one who had thrown the punch was Santos. The other one, the boxer, was Turner.

Santos sat glaring at him. Colby lowered his eyes to study the monitor screen. When he looked up, Santos's eyes were still fixed on him.

The kid was a hard case, he thought. Hell, they were all hard cases here. Even the PSMs, the quiet ones who spent most of the day nodding and staring into space, were dangerous when they came out of their fog. This wasn't a greenbelt prep school, where kids smiled at the teacher and carried their own reader deck. This was Inner City No. 3, where kids carried weapons. If they smiled, it was a sure sign they were getting ready to use them. No teacher could afford to forget that.

Colby switched to the speaker on Santos's console and said, "What's the matter, Santos? Your reader broken?"

"Not yet, general."

"Then get to work."

"Up yours, general."

"Get to work, Santos."

Santos pulled off his boot. Still looking straight at Colby, he brought the steel-tipped heel down hard on the reader screen. Those screens were made of a plexine tougher than the barrier that divided teachers from their classes, but Santos was not trying to break the reader, he was out for Colby. Colby knew it, and knew that he had to react. He locked the stinger on Santos.

"Hit the reader once more and you get stung," he said.

Santos brought the boot heel down, and Colby tapped the white button. Santos straightened like an icicle, then slumped in his seat. The boot dropped from his twitching fingers.

The room was very still. Colby ran a quick individual scan of all consoles. The PSMs, still deep under from their morning's dosage, were vegetables. The others all had their readers on, and some were making a pretense of following the bright images that capered across the screen in the day's reading assignment.

Colby felt better, with a sense that he was in control now. These kids had seen that a greenie could use the stinger as well as any I.C. old-timer.

They stayed put after that. Seeing

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someone stung always took the fight out of them for a time. The room was relatively peaceful for the remainder of the fifth period.

The bell rang at 11:30, the signal for shouts and stomping. Even a few of the PSMs showed signs of life. It was lunchtime for class 3-12A, and for Colby as well. He watched them file out, keeping his eyes on the corridor cameras to make sure the lanes remained clear and the traffic flowed smoothly. Once he saw the cafeteria doors locked behind class 3-12A, Colby was on his own, free until 12:15.

Colby took the teachers' passage to the dining room. It was shorter and faster than using the corridors, and he had to show his pass at only two checkpoints.

He was looking around the room for a place to sit when a stocky black man at the center table beckoned to him, saying, "Over here, buddy. Time you got to meet your colleagues."

Five men sat at the table. There was one empty place, and Colby settled into it, looked around the ring of faces, and said, "Thanks. My name's Tom Colby."

The others were all in their late twenties or early thirties. They were burly men, Colby's size or bigger. Their presence seemed to crowd the room. All were clean-shaven, with close-cropped hair, and all wore standard light-blue teaching fatigues like Colby's. They moved with the smooth easy grace of athletes.

"I'm Howard," said the man who had called him. He looked to be the oldest of the group, as well as the biggest. He wore senior instructor's stripes with seven hitch marks. Pointing to the man at his left, Howard went around the table clockwise. "This is Lehman, Wood, Bakersfield, and Hunter."

From across the table, Wood asked, "You're Young's replacemement, aren't you?"

"That's right," Colby replied.

"Yeah, I saw you in the shuttle this morning. Wondered who you were."

Bakersfield laughed and shook his head. "Lucky you, Colby. You got Santos and his whole zoo to keep you busy."

"It's not bad so far. Most of the class are on permanent medication."

"The ones who aren't can kill you. You used the stinger this morning. I picked up the static on the monitor."

"Santos was pushing pretty hard. I gave him a touch of it."

"That was smart," Howard said. "Most new guys wait too long before they use the stinger. They lose the initiative. I'd tell every new teacher to use it the first day."

"You're not new at this, are you, Colby?" Wood asked. "I heard that Young's replacement was coming from another school."

"I taught at Greenbelt No. 31 for two years," Colby said.

"You moved here from a Greenbelt school... what the hell did you do,

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Colby, lose your mind?"

"Just got greedy," Colby said blandly, and they laughed at his answer. He smiled and said, "What I really mean is, I needed extra money. Greenbelt schools are nice easy places to teach, sure, but it takes a long time and a lot of payoffs to get anywhere. My wife's going to have a baby in the fall, and we're hurting for money, so I volunteered for an I.C. hitch."

"You won't get rich here, buddy," said Lehman, and Wood added, "No, but you might get hurt."

Colby enumerated on his fingers as he said, "Inner City Teaching Corps means a pay differential, promotion preference, early retirement, total medical, full insurance... that's pretty good."

"It has to be. The work is rotten."

"What about endorsements, Colby? From what I hear, you can pick up a lot of endorsement money in the greenbelts," Bakersfield said.

"Not until you're there a while. I was starving."

Bakersfield raised an eyebrow and looked at him in disbelief. "Starving? At Greenbelt No. 31?"

"Well, all right, not starving, but I just couldn't get out of the hole. They'd only run a twelve-period day, but every teacher has to supervise a student activity, and everyone has a weekend study group. There's no money for that until you get to supervisory level. I couldn't hold down a part-time job, and my wife couldn't get any kind of work at all. There's nothing out there that isn't sewed up. I'm still paying off the people I had to bribe to get the job in the first place."

"Things sure have changed. When my father was in school, there was a shortage of teachers. Never had to bribe people to get an interview in those days," Howard said.

Bakersfield laughed. "You still don't — if it's an interview for Inner City No. 3."

"So now you're here. Think you can handle this ratpack after all that time in Greenbelt?" Wood asked.

"I went back and took the full course at Quantico. Four months ICTC Basic, eight weeks advanced. Came out first in my class."

"Young was pretty good, too, but they got him," Wood said.

"How?"

Howard answered. "Somebody waited for him in the teachers' passage. Caught him off-guard and put a knife into him. Seventeen times."

"How'd they get into the corridor?"

"Nobody knows. So don't get careless between checkpoints."

"Maybe nobody can prove it yet, but it was Santos," said Wood. "I covered that class last week, while they were looking for a replacement, and I could see it right away. The kid's dangerous."

"Santos is a hard case," Colby said. "He didn't give me much choice about using the stinger."

Wood went on as if he had not

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heard. "He's like a steel brick: hard as hell and all sharp edges. And he's smart, too, don't let him fool you. Everybody else in that class is a moron, but Santos has brains. He should be on permanent medication. Keep him doped up and the whole school will be better off."

"He'll be getting out soon, won't he?" Bakersfield asked.

"End of next term, if he doesn't screw up again," Howard said. "He's just waiting out a diploma so he'll be eligible for unemployment benefits. That's the only reason any of these kids are here."

"Kids? Santos is as old as you are, Howard."

"They shouldn't give that class a new guy. Santos will eat Colby alive." said Wood.

Without looking up from his coffee cup, Colby said evenly, "I'll handle Santos. Nobody has to worry about me."

Hunter, silent until now, looked around the table and said irritably, "Why the hell are we talking about Santos? It's lunchtime. You're getting me sick. Who watched the playoff last night."

Lunch kept everyone calm for a time, and the seventh and eighth periods passed with nothing more than a few minor scuffles. Colby cooled them with a warning. The kids looked at Santos, still appearing groggy from the morning's jolt, and decided to stay in their consoles and watch the science cartoons.

Today's ninth and tenth periods were set aside for a sex-education hollie, a weekly routine at all I.C. schools. Everyone from the superintendent on down knew that I.C. kids needed sex education as much as they needed classes in vandalism, but the life-sized, full-color holographic projections kept them quiet. There was some ethical objection to the practice, mostly from local preachers and neo-libertarians, but the pious warning tacked on the end of each hollie served to satisfy everyone else. The sex hollies gave the teachers a chance to catch their breath and get through the afternoon, and that was all anyone really cared about.

Urging and threats were unnecessary now. Every student was in his console before the bell rang. Colby activated the hollie matrix, dimmed the lights, and turned the class over to his automatic monitors. Ten minutes into the period, his intercom buzzed. It was Howard.

"How's it going, Colby?"

"Everybody's studious all of a sudden."

"They always are. We take our break these two periods. You go as soon as Wood gets back. He'll lock his monitor into yours when he leaves, and you reverse it when it's your turn."

"Right. Where do I go, the dining room?"

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"That's where most of us head. Be careful in the passage."

"I hear you, Howard. Thanks."

Ninth period flowed unnoticed into the tenth. At 2:40, Colby's intercom buzzed once again, this time with a message from Wood, who was leaving on his break. As they spoke, the backup monitor flashed the diagram of Wood's class.

Colby scanned both monitors quickly, then sat back to await Wood's return. At 2:45, restless, he arose, scanned the monitors again, and then did a visual check of his room.

Santos and two others were missing. They showed on the monitor, but their consoles were empty. There was no way of telling how long they had been gone.

Colby grabbed the intercom and hit the all-channels override. "Three students missing from 3-12A. They've found a way to bypass the monitor. I'm going to check the passage."

"Don't go in that passage alone!" Howard's voice thundered.

"Wood's on his break. He could need help," Colby said, cutting the switch before Howard could respond.

The lights in the passage were out. Colby flashed his handbeam in both directions, saw nothing, and headed for the dining room. Just beyond the first checkpoint, his light caught the cluster of struggling forms.

"Hang on, Wood!" he shouted.

Wood went down before he could reach him, and the three turned to face Colby. Two had knives, the third carried a club, and Colby had only the flashlight. He kept it to one side, at arm's length, aimed into their eyes, and moved in on them.

The passage was narrow. They had no way to surround him, and if two came at him simultaneously, they would only crowd each other. Santos fell back, and the other knife wielder, one hand before him to shield his eyes from the light, came forward to close with Colby.

He was eager, but not very good. Colby dodged his thrust and kicked hard at his kneecap. The kid screamed and went down. One more kick and he was out. Santos and the other one hesitated. Colby snatched up the fallen knife and moved in on them. Santos threw his knife down and both kids turned to run. Howard and Bakersfield were waiting for them.

The hollie ended with the standard warning, which drew the customary catcalls and whistling. Colby raised the lights. Two minutes later, the bell rang to end tenth period. The kids, all laughing and grinning except for the PSMs, filed out for dinner. If anyone noticed that Santos and the others were missing, he gave no sign of it.

Colby kept an eye on both monitors, his and Wood's, until the cafeteria doors closed behind their classes. When he entered the passage to the dining room, he noticed that the lights were working again.

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Wood and Howard came in halfway through the period. Wood had a bandage on his hand and a bruise on his forehead, but he flashed Colby a big grin. Howard only nodded. They brought their trays to Colby's table.

"Thanks, Colby," said Wood. "They had me boxed in. If you hadn't come along, I would have gotten what Young got."

Colby shrugged off his gratitude. "It could have been me in that corridor, and if it was, you'd have come in to help. That's what ICTC is all about, isn't it?"

"All the same, you saved my skin. How'd you know they were there?"

"Dumb luck. I just happened to do a visual check, and they were missing. I can't figure out how they did it, though."

"I told you Santos was smart, didn't I? He figured out a way to override all the monitors in his console. He also managed to unscramble the locks on the faculty-access doors. He could've caused a hell of a lot of trouble."

"Sure could. What'll they do with him?"

"Permanent socializing medication, as of right now. This was his tenth offense, so its automatic — no appeal," said Wood contentedly.

Howard added, "They'll keep him on here for another two years. Student stipend's only half what he'd get on unemployment. So that hits him in the pocket, where it really hurts."

"What about the others?"

"I recommended the same thing." Howard bit off a piece of roll, sipped his coffee, and off-handedly asked, "You didn't hear me say anything about not going into the passage, did you, Colby?"

Colby glanced at him quickly, but Howard was looking away. Colby looked to Wood for guidance. Wood closed his eyes and shook his head once, slowly.

"Not go in...? Gee, I don't recall hearing that," Colby said.

Howard turned to him and nodded, as if Colby had given the proper response. "I figured you didn't hear. I guess your intercom's out of order."

"I guess so," Colby said.

Howard emptied his coffee cup and set it down. "That's good," he said. "If you disobeyed a direct order, I'd have to report it, and that would look bad, this being your first day and all. I want you to have a nice clean record, Colby. We want you to stick around."

"I don't know, Howard. I hear that all these Greenbelt guys are soft," said Wood. He looked from one to the other, then broke into a grin and began to laugh.

"I heard that, too, but this one's learning fast," Howard said. "He'll make a good teacher some day."

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Paul Dellinger's new story is a suspenseful sf tale that begins with a man lost in a windstorm on Venus and ends with an incredible discovery.

To Reign In Hell

BY

PAUL DELLINGER

Of course he had a chance of surviving, Martin kept telling himself. There was always a chance — one in a hundred, or maybe a thousand, but still a chance.

Not that he really believed it.

He squeezed his eyes shut to block out the dizzying swirls and eddies blowing past the outside of his faceplate. The helmet and suit could stand up against the temperature and pressure for a full day — an Earth day, not the typical Venus day which was some 243 times as long — but that was no problem. Long before they started to melt, Martin's cooling system would overload and leave him cooking inside his already-shredded insulation. That didn't worry him overmuch, either. He would run out of oxygen even earlier, assuming he wasn't swallowed up first in one of the treacherous surface shifts of the planet or caught in one of its sulfuric acid rains.

Martin swallowed. Already his throat felt dry, even though common sense told him his suit was still intact. He sipped some water from the tube inside his helmet, but it didn't help.

Okay, then. Oxygen was the first concern. Martin opened his eyes and checked the gauges on his left wrist, bringing it close to his faceplate so Venus wouldn't play tricks on his vision. Less than a quarter of a tank — half an hour, if he was lucky. And luck came in limited quantities on Venus.

Thirty minutes to find his way back to Morning Star Compound, less than a kilometer away — but which way? Without the miniaturized radar-based imager that substituted for sight on Venus in windstorms like this one, he couldn't tell. Damn Leech for leaving him like this! Although Leech was probably right when he'd argued it

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would be quicker for him to return to Morning Star and bring another imager for Martin than for both to go with one traveling blind. But Leech should have gotten back before now. Could he have had trouble retracing their path, in this storm?

Or maybe Leech simply wasn't coming back.

The possibility had been tugging at the fringes of Martin's mind, but he'd tried to ignore it because, frankly, it scared the hell out of him. But it would be so simple, just to report Martin as lost in the storm — that would be nothing uncommon on Venus. And there was no getting around the fact that Leech had done his best to hurt or kill Martin just a little while ago. At least that had been direct, and Martin had been able to deal with it. But this....

Ostensibly the fight had been over the Venus bug. Of course Martin knew the real basis for Leech's dislike of him — the same reason that practically everyone else at Morning Star hated him. Although Leech even had an additional, more personal reason to boot.

The bug had showed up first as a glich on their imager screens, right atop the obvious radar reflection of the box-like seismic monitor they'd trekked out here to check. Leech was the first to recognize it for what it was.

"No wonder there was a power drain on the monitor," he said, his voice hard with anger. "The little bastard's drawing off energy from the batteries to gorge itself!"

That was about all anyone knew about the Venus bugs: they thrived on any form of electricity, whether generated by the human interlopers or the planet itself. In the Earth-year that Martin had been here, this was as close as he'd ever gotten to one of them — and all he could see was the vague flicker it made on his imager. In his excitement he pushed the imager screen up above his faceplate and looked out at Venus with naked eyes.

That was a mistake. He was probably less than three meters from the bug, but even that was too far to spot it in this storm. All he could see was the rock-strewn ground beneath his feet seeming to whirl around in a mad circle, as light trapped in churning atmosphere cast its mirages before him. He staggered in the direction of the monitor, determined not to lose the bug now. This last-minute opportunity, so close to the end of his year on Venus, seemed too good to believe. This was what had brought him to this hostile planet, what he'd worked toward for so long, and now he would finally see and perhaps capture one.

He did see it, looking like an oversized reddish-brown ant with four almost-transparent wing-like appendages, stretched out across the top of the Venusquake detector not unlike the way an Earth dog or cat would stretch out to bask in the sun. He also saw Leech's boot, poised right above it.

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"No!"

Maybe it was his shout that upset Leech's aim. Or maybe Leech somehow anticipated the awkward charge Martin was launching toward him. His foot missed the bug and caught the edge of the square monitor instead, giving Martin time to push him away before he could raise it again. Unbalanced as he was, Leech toppled to the ground. The bug had been jarred loose and flipped on its backside. It seemed momentarily helpless, its eight awkward-looking little legs scampering against nothingness as it tried to right itself. Martin knelt down as quickly as he could in the insulated suit, with its layers of heat-reflective wrappings, and caught the bug gently in his gloved hands.

He had just turned it over when the blow caught him on the side and he fell. The bug scrambled free of his intentionally light grip.

"You want to play games, we'll play games, kid," Leech said, his voice from his suit speaker carrying through the stormwind to Martin's audio. "Come on, get up."

Only then did Martin realize what he'd done. You don't shove someone like Leech around without expecting a fight. Now Leech felt free to vent all the hostility toward Martin that he'd managed to keep submerged previously, without stopping to consider where they were and what damaged even a chance blow could do to a suit. And yet, despite the danger, Martin was too upset at the loss of his bug to be afraid.

"Damn you, Leech," he blurted. "I almost had it —"

"I've had it, too," Leech said, obviously misunderstanding. "Get up, I said, or I'll stomp you like I should've stomped that bug!"

Martin's own anger cooled with the realization of how Leech must see the incident. Everyone at the compound saw the bugs only as pests — worse than that, as a danger. And they were right. Someone else would have to risk his neck lugging new batteries out here, now, so the monitor could continue sending early warnings to Morning Star of any Venusquakes from this direction. And this wasn't the first time since Martin had been here that a bug had ruined some energy source vital to the compound's survival.

"All right, Leech, take it easy," Martin said, forcing himself not to shout. "We'd likely kill each other if we tangled outside, like this—"

"Great. You're the only one of us who hasn't killed someone, right? You haven't been exiled here, you'll be going back soon. Well, now's your chance to try and find out what it's like. Get up!"

Martin pushed himself to his feet, pulling his imager back into place. This was crazy. But Leech was obviously quite serious about it. Martin blinked as sweat dripped from his forehead to sting his eyes, despite the cooling unit he carried. He found himself wishing fervently he could reach up with his

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hand and wipe it away.

He backed away, as the shimmering outline of Leech on his imager stalked toward him. Bright reflections also closed in from both sides as he gave ground, and Martin realized that Leech was forcing him into a confined area between two slopes where he couldn't maneuver and would have to fight. That could end only one way for one of them, and probably both. All it would take was a crack in his helmet, the tearing away of his insulating sheets of metallic wrappings, or any one of a dozen other things—

The wrappings! Suddenly Martin began tearing at them with his heavy gloves. The sound of his own harsh breathing filled his ears as he continued to backtrack and to peel away some of the protective heat shielding. Leech's image, arms spread to block any escape, followed with deadly deliberation as the space between the slopes got more narrow.

Finally Martin had pulled loose a couple meters of the stuff, crumpling it in front of him so it would not distort his outline on Leech's imager. He waited until Leech was almost on top of him, holding it out in front of him at arms length.

Leech fell for it. All at once, he leaped. Martin shoved the loose insulation at him and stepped aside as Leech stumbled by, trying to grapple with what looked like a solid object, and felt like an empty sack. Before he could recover, Martin was on top of him. They tumbled to the ground, with Martin on top, and in that position Leech was practically helpless. He tried to heave Martin off his back, and Martin felt the top of his helmet scrape against the rocks of the nearest slope. But it held together, and Martin simply kept sitting on Leech until the man subsided.

"Wait'll I get up, you little Earthworm!" he said, between gasps as he fought to regain his breath. "I'll break you in two—"

"Shut up!" The force in Martin's voice even surprised him. Probably a reaction to the narrowness of his escape, he thought, but it worked. Leech did shut up. "I wasn't picking a fight with you, you stupid ape! I was trying to catch that Venus bug in one piece."

At least half a minute of stunned silence followed. Then Martin heard sounds issuing from Leech that he couldn't identify right away. Finally he recognized it as laughter.

"Kid—" Another laughing fit interrupted Leech. "Kid, you know, I forgot what a nut you were about those bugs." The laughter was contagious. Martin found himself unable to keep from joining in. He unstraddled himself from Leech, and they both sat on the boiling soil of a hostile world that could kill them in any of a dozen ways, ignoring it as they laughed at each other and their own foibles.

When he gained control of himself again, Martin scrambled up without

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feeling above with his hand to see if it was clear. Once more he felt his helmet scrape. The radar-reflected terrain on his imager flickered, then vanished into a uniform grayness. Martin froze, still partly bent over. "Leech! My imager's conked out! I'm blind!"

"Easy, kid, let me look." He felt Leech working around behind him, getting close enough so he could withdraw his own imager for a detailed look. Even through the storm, he could hear the sharp intake of breath that emerged from Leech's speaker and knew the news wasn't good.

"How bad is it?" he asked.

"Bad enough. The cover's twisted loose and the adjustment knobs are gone. Looks like the transistors inside have taken a beating, too. I can't fix it. We'll have to get you another one."

"Hey," Martin protested. "I don't want to stay out here like this. Maybe I can follow along behind you—"

"You know better than that. A guy's lucky to watch out for himself in this crazy place, much less somebody else without his imager. You stay right here. I'll scoot back to Morning Star for another imager and new batteries for the monitor here while I'm at it."

"Leech—"

"You stay right here, kid. Don't move around. With this storm, I'd never be able to track you." Leech's voice was already fading as he moved off. Suddenly Martin found himself alone.

In a way, he'd been alone ever since he set foot on Venus — the only person on the planet who didn't have to be here. All the others had committed the one unpardonable sin of an age where population control was a fact, medicine had extended the average lifetime of the past century three-fold, and other branches of science had improved the quality of life even more. They had killed another human being.

Life had become such a precious commodity that the mere idea of capital punishment was abhorrent. But society found an escape-proof prison for those who had taken lives: the planet Venus, better known to some of its present inhabitants as Hell.

The few subsurface compounds that had been established, before it was decided that the trouble of exploring Venus wasn't worth the hazards, were reactivated and expanded to accommodate their new population. Earth supplied everything that population needed or wanted, banning it from only one area — space travel. The people of the home world didn't want their exiles, or even the descendants of those exiles, coming back to upset their well-planned and happy lives. Not ever.

Only later did the new inhabitants of Venus transmit the first photographs, taken by an automatic camera set up to see why so many powered instruments on the surface were failing, of the so-called Venus bugs.

As the first life-forms found on any planet besides Earth, the bugs created a sensation in scientific circles. Several

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religions that had put humankind back at the center of things retreated a step or two. At first authorities looked for trick photography, suspecting an attempt to trade false data for mass pardons or a reduction in the life sentences. No such demands materialized. Rather than seeking data, the Venus exiles asked for suggestions on how to exterminate the bugs.

One research group argued that the bugs must be mutations of Earth ants, which had escaped notice aboard early landers and managed to adapt. But most agreed that the bugs were indigenous to Venus, possibly living in the higher and cooler elevations where they escaped notice until they came down to feed on new energy sources brought by the humans.

Whatever they were, there was no way to systematically investigate their nature, since none of those sent to Venus were inclined to do so. So most of the scientific community on Earth — and Mars, Ganymede, Titan and the other human colonies — simply tried its best to forget about them.

Not Martin. When they wouldn't let him go to Venus through regular channels for a firsthand look, he persuaded one of his friends to go into hiding for a few months — long enough for Martin to fake the friend's murder, be tried, convicted, and on his way to Venus before the friend reappeared in public once more. Now, Martin was scheduled to be picked up and brought back home on the next annual supply ship which was due in a few Earth-weeks. Of course, he could simply have stayed aboard the ship that brought him here and gone straight back. The captain had tried to persuade him to do just that.

"You won't have a chance, boy. Why, they'd kill you out of sheer envy, knowing you'll be able to step back aboard the ship next year and leave. Don't be a fool."

"Do they have to know?" Martin asked mildly.

"They know already. This stunt of yours has been big news on the interplanet broadcasts. Stay aboard, lad. No discovery you could possibly make about a bunch of alien bugs could be worth it."

The captain had been wrong. Unless you counted Leech just now, nobody had attacked him during the past year. They never quite accepted him as one of them, but neither were they anything like the murderous pack of animals described by the captain and crew. If Martin hadn't known why they were here, he'd have assumed they volunteered. There were occasional gripes about Venus, of course, but no more than he used to hear on Earth about things like safety regulations or mandatory psychiatric checkups to ward off potential antisocial tendencies. Of course, knowing his situation, the people at Morning Star might intentionally avoided complaining where he could hear them. Maybe they thought it would

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make him feel superior.

Actually, Martin had found something here he'd never realized was missing on Earth — a kind of satisfaction about doing things yourself, with your hands, or as part of a team. Taking risks, sometimes, when it was necessary — something that was assiduously avoided back home.

There was also a feeling of participation in all the decisions, big and small, that he'd never experienced before. On Venus, everybody in every compound could vote on every issue that came up, through individual pocket communicators. It was a surprisingly functional pure democracy, made practical by the fewer numbers of inhabitants on this world. There was just one unchangeable law, and it was unwritten: You didn't ask others why they'd been exiled here. Martin had only broken that law once.

It had been with Brenda, when they were returning from a twelve-hour mapping trip in a landrover just a few Earth-weeks ago. Martin hadn't known who the driver was to be when he'd volunteered for the trip; he was hoping to catch one of the Venus bugs that had proved so elusive closer to Morning Star, before his time here was up. Naturally, Leech hadn't believed that for a minute. Even though he admitted he had no claims on Brenda, Leech still had aspirations and didn't appreciate the obvious friendliness between Martin and the slender auburn-haired woman who had probably helped map more of Venus' shifting surface than anyone at Morning Star. Leech had gone so far as to warn Martin privately against what he called any "funny business" with Brenda, since they both knew Martin could promise anything and get out of it simply by stepping aboard the supply ship that was now on its way here. Martin refrained from pointing out that Brenda would be aware of that, too.

And there had been no hanky-panky on the trip, just as Martin was sure there had been none between Brenda and any of her other partners on such jaunts. Even if there had been the desire, there would be no opportunity. Venus had too many traps set for the unwary. At least one person in the rover had to keep an eye on the machine's imager screens at all times.

That didn't mean the two couldn't talk. And, in its way, the talk could become more intimate than any brief sexual liaison. That was when Martin found himself asking what, on Venus, was the most personal question of all.

When she didn't reply at once, Martin feared he'd overstepped himself. He studied her profile as she sat in the driver's seat beside his, never taking her eyes from the forward screens and instrument panel in front of them. He was on the verge of apologizing when she finally spoke in a low voice.

"It was one of the state psychiatrists," she said. "He told me my tests showed that my attitudes were becoming too individualistic for our

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ultrastable society." Martin thought he detected sarcasm in that reference. "But he would be willing to report no need for therapy in my case if I'd — how did he put it? Oh, yes — if I'd be nice to him."

Martin stiffened in shock. The psychiatrists had become the elite, back on Earth. They were the ones who weeded potential trouble makers out of society. For one to use his position in such a manner was unthinkable. The possibility had never before occurred to Martin.

"When I said no, he got rough about it," Brenda went on, still not looking up. "He had turned off his video recorder, of course. It was on his desk. We struggled, and I hit him with it." She paused, then added: "He died."

"Didn't you explain what happened?"

"Without a record of the interview, who would have believed me?" she asked. "Besides, you know murder is the one crime for which there can be no excuse."

After that, Martin found himself wondering how many of the others had somehow been forced into the actions that sent them here. Self-defense? Accident? He would never have dreamed of asking anyone else. But Brenda — well, Brenda was another matter. By the time they arrived back at Morning Star, Martin was feeling quite differently about her than when they'd left. The feeling had continued to grow, since then. Even now, he didn't know how he was going to handle it.

Brenda never asked. She seemed satisfied just to be with him here, when she could. As far as Leech was concerned, though, Martin was doing exactly what Leech had warned him against: using Brenda as a pleasurable diversion toward the end of his time on Venus.

And wasn't Leech right, when you came down to it? After all, Martin couldn't take Brenda back with him. Knowing how Leech had felt about Brenda, Martin couldn't really blame the man for leaving him out here to die.

Hlo?

"Leech?" Hope surged anew within Martin. He opened his eyes, trying to peer through the still-churning soup of Venus' atmosphere. "Is that you?" As he stared, he tasted a bitter phlegm at the back of his throat and felt his stomach begin to revolt at the dizzying kaleidoscope assaulting his Earth-trained vision. He squeezed his eyes shut. If he started to vomit inside his helmet, he knew, he was finished. He lowered the dead imager screen to shield his sight from the illusory swirls around him. "Leech! Did you call...."

Except the imager *wasn't* dead! He was seeing again, as clearly as anyone ever saw on Venus. He recognized the slopes where he had backed away from Leech and even some of his own insulation that had torn loose in the struggle

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and lay on the ground. He could pick out the trail easily.

Martin felt like skipping along it back toward Morning Star but forced himself to move carefully. Obviously the imager controls hadn't been damaged as much as Leech said, but he certainly didn't want to jostle them out of kilter again. He had gone perhaps two or three hundred meters when he heard something again, above the winds of Venus outside.

"Kid! Help! Over here, in the fissure!"

Martin turned and saw the dropoff — a fresh one, judging by the sand pouring into it. The sand resembled a waterfall through his imager, as it filled in the gap. Venus had a way of healing its own wounds.

He dropped to his hands and knees near the edge and recognized the image of another suited figure just below him.

"Kid! Am I glad to see you. How'd you get that imager working again?"

The sand was up to Leech's chest, holding him fast. He would be buried before Martin could reach Morning Star and get back with enough manpower to drag him out. If Martin couldn't manage it alone, Leech was dead.

"Work one of your arms loose, Leech. Here, I'll help."

Martin leaned down and scooped at the sand until Leech managed to clear his right forearm. Martin gripped it with both hands and pulled. Gradually, the entire arm emerged. But try as he might, Martin couldn't budge the rest of Leech's bulk. And the sand had risen almost to his neck.

"And I was supposed to be helping you," Leech said, puffing. "It's a good thing you—"

"Don't talk! Pull!"

Martin was gasping himself by now, and he wondered for a second if he'd miscalculated the oxygen he had left. But he quickly decided it was from his exertions.

"Okay, let's get at your other arm," Martin panted between ragged breaths. "That'll give me some leverage."

Twice, Martin managed to scoop his way down to Leech's left hand. But, both times, Leech lacked the strength to raise it before more sand covered it again.

"No use, kid," he said. "Can't even keep my right arm up any more. Too tired—"

Martin grasped the right arm and held it clear. "Leech! You can't give up!"

"Just one thing...." Leech's voice barely carried to Martin now. "Kid, you gotta break off with Brenda some way, before you go...."

"You don't know what you're saying, Leech. Stop babbling and help me!"

"Be different if you were staying. But it'd be too much for her the other way. She thinks she's tough, but once she realizes you're gone, still feeling

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like she does about you—"

"Don't worry, Leech," Martin said, hanging onto the one free arm doggedly. "I'll keep her happy while I'm here. I'll tell her how you quit on me, how you were too delirious for me to salvage. She'll be so sympathetic, she'll fall right into the sack with me, don't you think? I'll be the poor, tired hero—"

"You little bastard!"

Martin grinned inside his helmet as Leech came to life again, struggling even more than before. Martin bailed away at the sand again and, this time, he was rewarded by the bright image of Leech's other arm breaking free. "If I get hold of you—"

"That's it, Leech! Grab my hands. Now, pull with one arm — now the other — pretend you're milking a cow!"

Martin planted his boots at the very edge of the fissure. "Kid, back up!" The anger was gone from Leech's voice. Obviously, he now realized why Martin had goaded him. "That edge could go any time, and we'd both be stuck."

"Will you shut up and pull?"

Hlo, Mrtn.

"Hello yourself. Pull, dammit!"

Martin pressed down with one foot, then the other, heaving with all the strength he had left. His shoulders felt as though they would crack with the strain. His fingers were numb, inside the gloves. His breath came in raw gasps, and his throat ached as much as his body. Spots danced before his eyes, threatening to merge into the blackness of oblivion. But Leech stayed stuck in the grip of the packed sand.

Oh. I see....

More spots appeared. But these were tiny bright spots on his imager, circling around Leech's head and shoulders and abruptly diving into the sand like so many miniature buzz saws. Martin felt their effect at once. Somehow they were stirring the sand loose below. Leech was coming free.

That was the last thing he remembered before he regained consciousness, back at Morning Star. Later, Brenda told him that Leech had carried him the rest of the way, slung over a shoulder — an incredible feat of strength. But Leech said nothing about that when they first talked.

"They seemed to come out of nowhere," he said, recounting it for the third time. "All those bugs. For a minute there, I had the crazy notion they were attacking me, for trying to stomp that one earlier. But the little buggers were in their element, in that sand. Next thing I knew, you had me out."

Martin nodded weakly, lying on the bunk.

"What I can't figure out is how you got that imager of yours to work," Leech went on. "I've looked at it since we got back, and the connections inside were ripped loose. And I figured that bug would've chewed up what was left—"

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"Bug?" Martin sat up so fast he almost bumped his head on the bunk above his. "What bug?"

"Didn't you know there was a bug nesting in there? I saw it fly out when I picked you up—"

That's why the imager worked! Don't you get it, Leech? The bug must've made the connections itself! The power was flowing through it."

"That's crazy, kid. Those things consume energy, they don't conduct it."

"They must." Martin grew more excited, as the disjointed events of the past hour reassembled themselves in his mind. "And they're intelligent, Leech! One of them communicated with me somehow, probably the one on the back of my helmet. Maybe it was the one I saved, returning the favor—"

"Hey, kid, calm down." Leech eased him back on the bunk with a firm hand on his shoulder. "You need to rest some more. Look—" The bigger man hesitated, seeming at a loss for words. "I just wanted to say this, before we talk to the others. I'm sorry for what I pulled out there. What goes between you and Brenda — well, that's your business, yours and hers. I'll keep my nose out of it, from now on until the ship comes—"

Martin felt a grin creeping across his face. "Don't worry about Brenda any more, Leech. I'm not taking any ship back."

Leech stared at him, as a grin formed on his own face "You're *staying?*"

"There's more than a lifetime's work to be done here," Martin said. "When I can prove what I learned today, there'll be researchers begging to come here. This won't be the first new frontier started by a government shipping its malcontents and undesirables to it. And with what we can learn from them—"

He closed his eyes. Whether it was his imagination, or real, he could hear it again in his mind, seemingly more distant than before but definitely there.

Hlo....

Hello, Martin thought back. And the great adventure had begun.

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James Kelly ("Death Therapy," July 1978; "Not to the Swift," February 1979) is back with a first-rate story about a sensible, orderly student who has frivolous dreams about flying, and what happens when the dreams begin to intrude on reality.

Flight of Fancy

BY

JAMES PATRICK KELLY

At first it was only a dream. Marley did not usually remember dreams, but this one came to him again and again as graduation approached.

The dream always began as another was ending. Marley stalked angrily away from a group of friends with whom he had just argued. Some shouted at him to come back; others dared him to. On impulse he turned toward them, broke into a loping stride, leapt high into the air — and hung there, laughing exultantly at the disbelief and fear on their upturned faces. A breeze carried him off as easily as a bit of dandelion fluff.

As the ground fell away, he surrendered himself to the giddy and unfettered pleasures of floating. The vastness of a god's view overwhelmed the floater; he strained to see everything.

The dream always ended when he realized that he was floating. Logic turned his limbs to stone. Sometimes he plummeted, screaming; more often he glided regretfully to the ground and the darkness between dreams.

Marley worried about dreaming such a dream. While he was awake his passion was order; he coped best with things in their proper places. At that time Joe Marley's place was 614 Daniels Tower, Wabash State University, Newhope, Indiana. In the order of things he was a senior in the civil engineering department, specializing in sanitary engineering. When he graduated he planned to marry the only girl he had ever slept with and settle into a permanent place working for his father at Marley & Munson, Consulting Engineers. Only occasionally, when he had drunk his bellyful at the senior bar, did Marley permit himself to wonder whether designing the best sewers in southeastern Indiana might not someday grow tedious.

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Oehlerts complained that Marley gnashed his teeth when he dreamed and made slurping noises in his throat. "Wet moans," he called them. Oehlerts was five feet five inches tall, weighed one sixty and would tell you if pressed that he was mean enough to bite the head off a dead frog and spit it in your face. Although he also was enrolled as a civil engineer, Oehlerts had spent the major part of his college career becoming the number-one seed and co-captain of Wabash's tennis team.

The two were classically symbiotic roommates. Marley was a quiet, fastidious student, the kind whose class notes are in demand during finals. He was no genius, but his well-developed scholastic skills had earned him a chance to graduate with high honors. Oehlerts was as recklessly belligerent as a short man with brains and talent can be. He seemed to know something about every woman on campus and next to nothing about civil engineering. The secret of their gruff friendship was that they never competed against each other for the same prize.

One Thursday afternoon after his soil mechanics class, Marley returned to Daniels Tower in a black mood. He had been up all night typing an excruciatingly dull sociology paper. The room smelled like yesterday's sweat. Oehlerts, who was in Chicago for a tournament, had left the place a mess. Marley picked a limp white sock and a damp towel from the floor and deposited them on Oehlerts's unmade bed. He opened a window, kicked off his sandals and climbed up to his bunk for a nap.

As Marley slept the dream came to him. He floated over the quadrangle watching the frisbee players. He thought he might like to swoop down and intercept the frisbee in midair. Instead he dove into a dream cloud and was bathed in warm, honey-scented vapors. As the floater emerged from the cloud, a breeze chilled him. He rolled on his back and stared up at the pale sun of his imagination. Almost time to wake up, he thought.

He curled into himself to protect his warmth but grew still colder. Drifting between the dream and consciousness, he opened his eyes just wide enough to see through the lashes. He saw feet, bare, uncovered. As he reached for the blankets he noticed that the toenails needed clipping. There were no blankets.

There was no bed.

He was floating. Startled, but not yet free of the dream, the floater twisted to the right and saw the bunk — on the other side of the room. He looked down at the floor: too far, much too far.

Marley fell with an odd sense of detachment, as if what was happening did not involve him. His right arm hit first; less than a heartbeat later his forehead crashed against the floor.

The windows of the infirmary were full of orange light. Dusk, he thought

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dazedly. Or a fire. His arm burned from the inside out. In a panic he remembered the floating, then told himself that his head ached too much to worry about it. He slept.

The next time Marley woke it was morning. His arm was on fire and for the first time he noticed the cast. His call for help was barely a croak, but a nurse came anyway, gave him water and a red pill, and asked what he wanted for breakfast. A younger nurse brought him dry toast and orange juice and stayed to talk. She said that he had a mild concussion and a simple fracture of the right radial near the wrist. Her voice was as soothing as a long, hot bath and she looked nothing at all like Jan, Marley's fiancée. She told him that he would have a cast at least until graduation, and he asked her what her name was.

A few pleasant moments later, Denice smiled at him and said that she had to go. Marley's smile was lopsided and his head was spinning from the pill. He wanted to tell her that she was the most beautiful girl in Indiana, but before he could think of the right way to say it, she was gone.

That afternoon Oehlerts delivered Marley's *Principles of Soil Mechanics*, *Modern Financial Management*, and *Developing Musical Perceptions* and all his notebooks, including one from the previous semester. From between two notebooks he produced the May issue of *Penthouse*, which he clumsily slid under Marley's sheets.

"Here toadface. Check this out when you get tired of booking. So how's the arm?"

"Hurts."

"They give you something for it?"

"Yeah, but it wears off."

"You must have been having one hell of a dream," Oehlerts said as he pulled up a chair. "We found you over by the desks. Blankets all over the place. You must have stood on that bunk and taken a royal swan dive."

"Think so?"

"What were you aiming for, anyway? A pool full of centerfolds?"

"You're a sick man, Oehlerts. Sick." Marley smoothed the sheet where Oehlerts had wrinkled it. "So what happened yesterday? Did you win your match?"

On the day Marley was released the temperature at noon was ninety-four, a record high for the day. Not only did walking make his arm ache worse than ever, but now it was itchy too. He was secretly pleased with the sling, though. Marley had always thought that men with slings looked adventuresome; he put a hint of swagger in his step when he noticed people turning to watch him pass. And with the help of a red pill from the bottle Denice had given him, he could endure pain as well as any man.

By evening the day's relentless heat had wilted his good spirits. As he watched Oehlerts prepare for his Saturday night spree, he wished he was

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back in the infirmary with Denice and the air conditioning. Oehlerts, who had broken his leg the year before, unbent a coat hanger and showed him how to use it to scratch. Around nine o'clock Claire and Beth came by to collect Oehlerts and sign Marley's cast.

After they had gone Marley made a half-hearted attempt to study, then picked up one of Oehlert's tennis magazines. He could hear laughter and loud conversation in the room below. Above him somewhere a stereo brayed; his arm throbbed to the rhythm of the bass. The article he was reading on topspin lobs was as interesting as a deoderant commercial. He was supposed to wait another three hours before the next pill. Marley thought awhile before he took off his watch and put it in the top drawer of his desk. There was no way he could last that long. He shook a red pill from the bottle and popped it into his mouth.

He tuned his own stereo to the campus station, the only one in the area that was not top forty or country-western. After the ten o'clock news a sleepy-voiced announcer welcomed him to the Saturday night Space Program. Marley liked this show in part because Oehlerts said that the music on it sounded like wind chimes accompanied by a musical saw. He turned the volume way down: just loud enough to drown out party noise. Then he undressed, turned out the lights and climbed carefully up to the top bunk.

Marley closed his eyes and willed himself to relax, but the stream of consciousness cascaded through him with the roar of a waterfall. He tried unsuccessfully to bore himself to sleep by staring into the green shadows cast by the lights of the stereo. The sheets felt like burlap. What could he think about, then? Not his courses: he was falling behind and his *magna cum laude* was in jeopardy. Not his fiancée, Jan, who was a couple of hundred miles away, down at St. Mary-of-the-Woods in Terre Haute. Not his dreams; especially not....

"Floating," he said defiantly. "Float, floated, floating." Was it possible that he actually had floated? He told himself again that it was not. That he only thought he had floated. But his delusion had been totally convincing; how could he tell the difference? Marley felt as if he were playing tag with himself in a hall of mirrors.

"There is only one way to settle the issue," he said in his professorial tone of voice. "Experimentally." He climbed down to Oehlert's bunk, giggling when he almost lost his balance.

Marley lay on his back across the lower bunk so that his head hung just over the edge and his feet were scrunched up against the wall. He pushed himself out a little and his neck tensed to support the full weight of his head. He pushed a little more and his shoulders dropped off the edge. Stomach muscles went taut and blood rushed to his head. Looking at the darkened room upside-down disturbed Marley. There

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was a whispering in his ears and his head felt as if it were filling with helium. Balloonhead Marley — it sounded like something Oehlerts might call him. When Marley was five his mother had bought him a balloon shaped like a clown's head at the State Fair in Indianapolis and had tied the string around his wrist so that he would not lose it. But it was a windy day and a gust had snapped the string. He remembered watching with regret and envy as the clown whirled away into the dazzling blue sky. Why did floating have to make sense?

The floater kicked away from the wall as tension flowed out of him through his fingers and toes. For a time he was satisfied to lie in the deep shadows on the ceiling, but eventually he gave in to the urge to play. He balanced on his tongue at the tip of a candle. He somersaulted up one wall and down the other. Then he grabbed Oehlerts's desktop fan, puffed out his cheeks and cruised ponderously on a circle like a blimp at a football game.

The room was too small for him. He tried to squeeze through the window, but it would not open wide enough. He bounded over to the door.

The hall lights blinded him. He shut his eyes and covered them with his hands as he landed with a bump on the doorsill. He frowned, lifted and bumped again. Peeking through his fingers, Marley willed himself to float. Nothing happened. Footsteps echoed on the stairway at the end of the hall. Someone, he thought, terrified of being discovered while he was out of control, someone coming here! He rolled back into the room and kicked the door shut. The thunderclap it made shattered his self-control; he lay there wide-eyed and trembling. A tear unmanned him; others followed and mingled with the sweat that dribbled down his face.

Marley tried to make a joke of it, but his "minor psychotic episode" soon became an obsession. No matter how he approached the floating, as illusion or reality, he had to admit that something extraordinary was happening, something out of his control. He could not bring himself to overdose on the red pills again, yet when he finally held the empty bottle in his hand he felt cheated.

He set about catching up with his course work but found that he could not concentrate as before. It was like trying to write a sociology paper while his own birthday party was going on next door. His shaky A in Soils became a possible B, and he considered taking an Incomplete in Financial Management to save the semester.

At night Marley went out with Oehlerts to see if alcohol might put him in a floating state of mind. All that he accomplished was to meet the regulars down at the senior bar. When one of his new friends spilled beer on his cast and washed off most of the signatures, Marley gave up drinking.

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He went into Newhope to see Carmony, an old friend who had been trying to turn him on since they were juniors in high school. It was only the third time that Marley had tried marijuana, and after an hour-long smoking session, he yielded briefly to gluttony and then to an irresistable temptation to sleep. He was awakened at four thirty in the morning by a backache and found himself curled on top of Carmony's tiny kitchen table. Despite repeated attempts, however, Marley never again floated while he was stoned.

As finals drew near he had trouble sleeping and spent most of his afternoons in a funk. He realized glumly that if, in fact, he could float, then either he controlled his ability or it would control him. Until he had control, there was always a chance that he could be injured again or even killed. And without control he dared not tell anyone that he, Joseph Marley, Jr., could personally repeal the law of gravity. On the last day of classes Marley decided to take a chance and ask Oehlerts for help.

Oehlerts said that he had learned hypnosis from a psychiatrist in Chicago who specialized in helping athletes come back from major surgery. Once, at a party, Marley had seen him give a hotshot on the freshman tennis team the posthypnotic suggestion that every time the kid finished a beer he should stand up, sing "Bash'em Wabash," the school fight song, and toss a piece of his clothing out the window. Marley knew that he risked being the butt of one of Oehlerts's mindless practical jokes, but he had run out of safe ideas.

Oehlerts was lying on his bunk wearing Marley's quadrophonic headphones. His mouth hung slightly ajar and his eyes were closed. A copy of the Monarch Notes on Robert Heinlein had slipped face-down on his chest. One of Oehlerts's gut courses that semester was A.B. Brennan's notorious Fictive Science and the Future.

Oehlerts shivered when Marley touched his arm; then he lifted the headset cups and peered sleepily up at him.

"Got a minute?"

He lowered the cups back over his ears. "Busy," he said disinterestedly; his eyelids flickered and fell shut.

Marley nudged him harder.

"Ferchrissakes!" He jerked the headphones off, dropped them on the bed and glared at Marley. "So?"

"I have to talk to someone. You're it."

"Who do I look like, Joyce Brothers? Okay, okay; sorry. What's happening?"

"Oehlerts, do you think you could hypnotize me?"

He sat up, shaking his head sadly. "Why me, Lord? Why? All right, come closer. Roll your eyes up as far as they can go in your head. Keep them open, that's it. All I want to see is white. Stop. I've seen enough."

"Well?"

"Maybe." He studied Marley

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thoughtfully. "Why?"

"I ... I'm having trouble studying. Since I busted my arm I haven't been able to concentrate. If this keeps up I'm going to flunk Soils."

Oehlerts swung around and sat on the edge of his bunk. He selected a pair of white socks from a pile of dirty laundry and put them on. "Go see what's-his-face, that counselor. The shrink."

"That guy's a jerk, and you know it."

"Hey, look, spaceshot, I don't want to mess around with your head. You're screwed up enough as it is. Christ, I'm not even sure that I can put you under."

"I'm asking you for help, Oehlerts."

"Then don't give me this crap about flunking Soils or anything else," he said indignantly. "I know what it is, I know. As if it makes any difference whether your grade-point average is three four nine or a lousy three five. I say if you don't want to study, then don't study, dammit!" He stood up and unplugged the earphones from the stereo. The speakers roared Led Zeppelin and he quickly turned down the volume. "So I hypnotize you. What then?"

"You fix it so I can put myself under. That way, when I want to concentrate, I'll be able to block out everything else."

"Okay, I'll do it, but let's get it over with right now. I've got A.B.'s final tomorrow, and tonight we're driving up to the dunes for a cookout." Oehlerts rummaged through his desk drawers until he found a candle molded in the shape of an elongated head, which had burned down to the top of the eyebrows. He lit it, set it on Marley's desk and gestured to the chair. Marley saw definite traces of a smirk on his face but sat down nevertheless. Oehlerts turned out the lights and snapped the dusty venetian blinds shut.

"Now, then, what you do is stare at the flame. Keep staring; shut every thought from your mind but the flame." Oehlerts spoke slowly and his voice had an unusual timbre; it seemed more sincere than usual, steadfast, steady as the flame. "The flame," he said, "if you stare at it long enough, the room will get darker. When that happens, try to take the flame inside your head and close your eyes. You still see the flame, right? Good. What you just did, Marley, was concentrate. It was easy, wasn't it? All you did was block out everything but the flame. From now on you'll see the flame in your Soils book. You'll see it in...." Oehlerts looked over Marley's shoulder and read off the titles from his bookcase, "...Computer Methods II and in Introduction to Sociology. You'll see the flame in your Musical Perceptions, or ... uh ... you'll hear it, I don't know. You'll *perceive* it in your Musical Perceptions." He glanced through the notebooks neatly stacked on the desk. "And you'll see the flame

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in your Financial Management book, wherever that is, and in all these notebooks here, and that's it. Do you understand?"

Marley nodded, although by this time he was convinced that he was not hypnotizable. He had gone along with Oehlerts in the hope that whatever was supposed to happen would catch up with him. He knew he could not possibly obey Oehlerts's commands to study until he had solved his floating problem. So when Oehlerts told him that it was over, Marley believed that nothing had changed.

"Satisfied?" Oehelrts asked, grinning.

"It didn't work."

"No? Sorry — you get your money back. Here, why don't you take your books and run along to the library and try to forget about it. When's your first final?"

"Financial Management on Wednesday."

"Well, what are you waiting for?" He piled Marley's books into his attache case, snapped the lid shut and handed it to him. "If you get your ass in gear, you'll have plenty of time."

"Maybe," Marley said doubtfully. "But I'd have to start right now and pull at least two all-nighters."

"Sure, sure. So leave already. I've got finals too, you know."

As he reached the steps at the end of the corridor, Marley might have heard the muffled sound of laughter coming from his room had not his attention been riveted on the difference between podsolic and chernozemic soils.

The next ten days passed in a blur of thin-lined notepaper and empty coffee cups. Marley soaked up formulas like beach sand soaks up spilled beer and aced both his Financial Management and Soils finals. He cranked out one last sociology paper. When the computer accepted his test program without a glitch, he was home free. All that he had left was the music test on Monday night, and that was meaningless since he had taken the course pass-fail.

After the music final Marley did not go with Oehlerts down to the senior bar, where drafts were a dime to kick off the week of debauchery before graduation. Marley did not feel like celebrating the end of college. Instead he wandered aimlessly about campus until he came to the lake at its eastern boundary. A path ran into the tamed woods which hugged the shoreline.

At the far side of the lake there was a grassy clearing dotted with benches. He sat and gazed vacantly back at the golden dome of the administration building, ablaze with artificial light. Marley felt a stillness growing within him as he watched the golden reflection dance across ruffled waters; it looked as if the lake were in flames. He yawned and closed his eyes for a brief rest before he headed back to the dorm. Sleep claimed him instantly.

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He dreamed. He dreamed that Oehlerts was auctioning off parts of his body to the two hundred people in his Soils class. His father, his mother and Jan were selling beer and popcorn in the aisles. Marley was embarrassed but he allowed Oehlerts to poke and prod him because he believed that was his father's wish. Everyone wanted a piece of Marley and the bidding was hotly contested. When he was all bought and paid for, Oehlerts pulled out a blunt-edged cafeteria knife and announced that it was time to start carving. His father beamed at him proudly. Marley panicked; he had to get out. There was no way out. He looked up into the gloom of the high rafters of the lecture hall, took two desperate strides to build speed and leapt into the air, passing over everyone and streaking for the narrow windows near the ceiling. Just before impact, he managed to duck behind his cast. He heard glass shatter and then he was clear.

The floater shot up into the night sky with his eyes wide open. Although he was no longer truly asleep, from an altitude of three hundred feet reality confronted him with the imagery of a dream. A breeze blew him over the fire on the lake back toward campus. The golden dome loomed and he swooped down to it, landing at the apex beside the statue of Athena. He had looked upon the goddess many times in his years at Wabash, but never as intimately as this. He ran his hands over her hard, classical features and was disappointed to feel blemishes. The gold plating had begun to chip and peel.

He heard voices and saw students gather below him. Some shouted unintelligible advice; others merely cheered. He waved, remembering that it was considered a supreme accomplishment to have climbed the dome.

"Think that's something?" he called down to them. "Watch this." He pushed away from Athena into the wind and floated briefly over the crowd before he was carried back to the goddess's. Shouts mixed with screams.

"The hell with you, then," he muttered as he edged over to the leeward side of the statue. He took a deep breath, kicked out into the night.

The breezes carried him out into the farm country that surrounded the college town. Out in the mucky cornfields he experimented with his new ability. He found that his outstretched windbreaker made a passable sail, and, after much trial and error, he discovered that by controlling his buoyancy in the air he could traverse huge chunks of landscape with one soaring bound. It took him only twenty minutes to beat his way against the wind back to the lights of campus.

The floater reached Daniels Tower sometime after two in the morning and glided silently down the long row of windows on the sixth floor. Most were dark. His was not. The floater checked his momentum at the edge of the open casement window and hung outside.

Oehlerts was there with Beth, who

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still had her underwear on. He watched in amazement as Oehlerts climbed over his own slovenly bunk up to the floater's, which was neat enough to pass military school inspection. Oehlerts put out his hand to help Beth up.

"Hey," the floater said. "Hey, you."

Beth fell backwards, staggering; her face was ashen. "Who said that?" She hurried over to the window. "Jesus, it's the flying man! Come quick — the one on the news."

"Shit." Oehlerts stalked across the room. He seemed angry, but when he recognized the floater, his mouth just opened, closed and opened again. "It's Marley," he said finally.

"He can't really fly, can he?"

"I don't think so." Oehlerts edged over to the window and stared out at the floater. "Hey yourself, Marley." Gravity wrenched at the floater's gut; he looked six stories down and easily imagined how it would feel to slam into the pavement.

"Get the hell down before you kill yourself," Oehlerts said.

Marley knew his mortal danger: he did not belong where he was and never would belong. The risks were too great. He abandoned floating and dove frantically for the window.

He managed to hook his good arm around the window frame and into the room, but he treaded air for a few seconds before he found a foothold on the six-inch ledge. "Oehlerts, let me in!" Marley's voice rose to a shriek.

"Can't, the windows ... hold on, okay. Just hold on." He tore through his closet and grabbed a metal tennis racket. "I'll break the window."

"No! In my face, Oehlerts? In my face you're breaking glass? Loop the extension cord, or a rope if you find one, and get it out here. Hurry. And pull a fire alarm, dammit!"

Beth settled onto the lower bunk and morosely picked up her tee shirt. "This is a joke, right?" she said to Marley. "The fire department isn't...."

She was interrupted by a shrill ringing in the hall. Doors opened; there were shouts. Oehlerts burst into the room carrying a Muhammad Ali autograph jump rope.

After the firemen got him down, the campus police arrested Marley for illegal trespass on university property; that is, climbing the golden dome. Marley did not graduate with his class because the university always pressed charges against dome-climbers for insurance purposes. In late August the judge dismissed charges when Marley's lawyer pointed out that it was impossible for anyone to climb the dome the way that the prosecution claimed Marley had climbed it. Marley's diploma, *magna cum laude*, arrived just before Christmas. After Jan and the family had the chance to admire it, he hung it at eye level behind the expensive desk in his office at Marley & Munson.

He learned once again to regard his dreams as frivolous and in time forgot them altogether.

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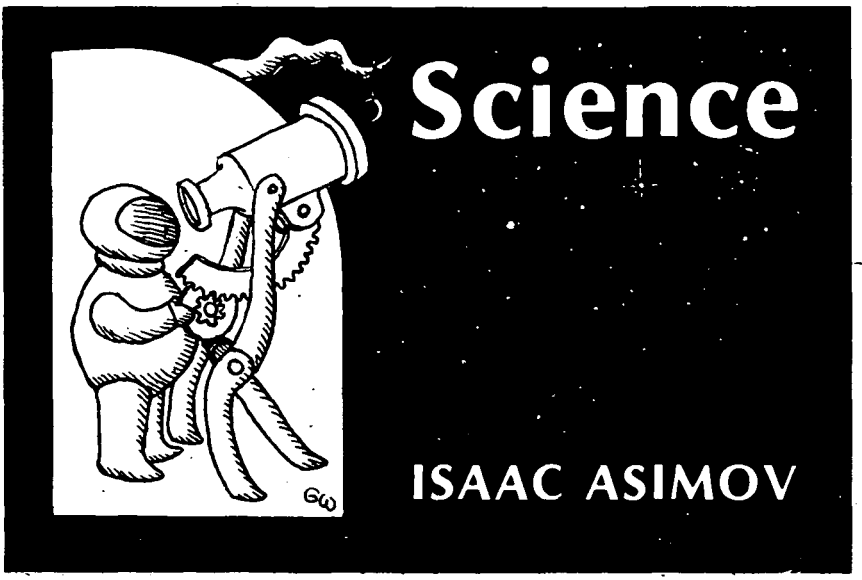

ALAS, ALL HUMAN

When I was doing my doctoral research back in medieval times, I was introduced to an innovation. My research professor, Charles R. Dawson, had established a new kind of data notebook that one could obtain at the university bookstore for a sizable supply of coin of the realm.

It was made up of duplicate numbered pages. Of each pair, one was white and firmly sewn into the binding, while the other was yellow, and was perforated near the binding so that it could be neatly removed.

You placed a piece of carbon paper between the white and yellow when you recorded your experimental data, and, at the end of each day, you zipped out the duplicate pages and handed them in to Dawson. Once a week or so, he went over the pages with you in detail.

This practice occasioned me periodic embarrassment, for the fact is, Gentle Reader, that in the laboratory I am simply not deft. I lack manual dexterity. When I am around, test-tubes drop and reagents refuse to perform their accustomed tasks. This was one of the several reasons that made it easy for me, in the fullness of time, to choose a career of writing over one of research.

When I began my research work, one of my first tasks was to learn the experi-

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mental techniques involved in the various investigations our group was conducting. I made a number of observations under changing conditions and then plotted the results on graph paper. In theory, those values ought to have fallen on a smooth curve. In actual fact, the values scattered over the graph paper as though they had been fired at it out of a shotgun. I drew the theoretical curve through the mess, labelled it "Shotgun Curve" and handed in the carbon.

My professor smiled when I handed in the sheet and I assured him I would do better with time.

I did — somewhat. Came the war, though, and it was four years before I returned to the lab. And there was Professor Dawson, who had saved my shotgun curve to show people.

I said, "Gee, Professor Dawson, you shouldn't make fun of me like that."

And he said, very seriously, "I'm not making fun of you, Isaac. I'm boasting about your integrity."

That puzzled me but I didn't let on. I just said, "Thank you," and left.

Thereafter, I would sometimes try to puzzle out what he had meant. He had deliberately set up the duplicate-page system so that he could keep track of exactly what we did each day, and if my experimental technique turned out to be hopelessly amateurish, I had no choice but to reveal that fact to him on the carbon.

And then one day, nine years after I had obtained my Ph.D., I thought about it and it suddenly occurred to me that there had been no necessity to record my data directly in my notebook. I could have kept the data on any scrap of paper and then *transferred* the observations, neatly and in good order, to the duplicate pages. I could, in that case, have omitted any observations that didn't look good.

In fact, once I got that far in my belated analysis of the situation, it occurred to me that it was even possible to make changes in data to have them look better, or to invent data in order to prove a thesis and *then* transfer them to the duplicate pages.

Suddenly, I realized why Professor Dawson had thought that my handing him the shotgun curve was a proof of integrity, and I felt terribly embarrassed.

I like to believe that I have integrity, but that shotgun curve was no proof of it. If it proved anything, it proved only my lack of sophistication.

I felt embarrassed for another reason. I felt embarrassed over having thought it out. For all those years since the shotgun curve, scientific hanky-panky had been literally inconceivable to me, and now I had conceived it, and I felt a little dirty that I had. In fact, I was at this point in the process of changing my career over into full-time writing, and I felt relieved that this was happening. Having now thought of hanky-panky, could I ever trust myself again?

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I tried to exorcise the feeling by writing my first straight mystery novel, one in which a research student tampers with his experimental data, and is murdered as a direct result. It appeared as an original paperback entitled *The Death-Dealers* (Avon, 1958) and was eventually re-published in hardcover under my own title of *A Whiff of Death* (Walker, 1967).

And lately, the subject has been brought to my attention again—

Science itself, in the abstract, is a self-correcting, truth-seeking device. There can be mistakes and misconceptions due to incomplete or erroneous data, but the movement is always from the less true to the more true.*

Scientists are, however, not Science. However glorious, noble, and supernaturally incorruptible Science is, scientists are, alas, all human.

While it is impolite to suppose that a scientist may be dishonest, and heart-sickening to find out, every once in a while, that one of them is, it is nevertheless something that has to be taken into account.

No scientific observation is really allowed to enter the account books of Science until it has been independently confirmed. The reason is that every observer and every instrument has built-in imperfections and biases so that, even assuming perfect integrity, the observation may be flawed. If another observer, with another instrument, and with other imperfections and biases, makes the same observations, then that observation has a reasonable chance of possessing objective truth.

This requirement for independent confirmation also serves, however, to take into account the fact that the assumption of perfect integrity may not hold. It helps us counteract the possibility of scientific dishonesty.

Scientific dishonesty comes in varying degrees of venality; some almost forgivable.

In ancient times, one variety of intellectual dishonesty was that of pretending that what you had produced was actually the product of a notable of the past.

One can see the reason for this. Where books could be produced and multiplied only by painstaking hand-copying, not every piece of writing could be handled. Perhaps the only way of presenting your work to the public would be to pretend it had been written by Moses, or Aristotle, or Hippocrates.

If the pretender's work is useless and silly, claiming it as the product of a great man of the past confuses scholarship and mangles history until such time as the matter is straightened out.

**Lest someone ask me "What is truth?" I will define the measure of "truth" as the extent to which a conception, theory, or natural law fits the observed phenomena of the Universe.*

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Particularly tragic, though, is the case of an author who produces a great work for which he forever loses the credit.

Thus, one of the great alchemists was an Arab named Abu Musa Jabir ibn Hayyan (721-815). When his works were translated into Latin, his name was transliterated into "Geber" and it is in that fashion he is usually spoken of.

Geber, among other things, prepared white lead, acetic acid, ammonium chloride and weak nitric acid. Most important of all, he described his procedures with great care and set the fashion (not always followed) of making it possible for others to repeat his work and see for themselves that his observations were valid.

About 1300, another alchemist lived who made the most important of all alchemical discoveries. He was the first to describe the preparation of sulfuric acid, the most important single industrial chemical used today that is not found as such in nature.

This new alchemist, in order to get himself published, attributed his finding to Geber, and it was published under that name. The result? We can speak only of "The False Geber." The man who made this great discovery is unknown to us by name, by nationality, even by sex, for the discoverer might conceivably have been a woman.

Much worse is the opposite sin of taking credit for what is not yours.

The classic case involved the victimization of Niccolo Tartaglia (1500-1557), an Italian mathematician who was the first to work out a general method for solving cubic equations. In those days, mathematicians posed problems to each other, and upon their ability to solve these problems rested their reputations. Tartaglia could solve problems involving cubic equations and could pose problems of that sort which others found insoluble. It was natural in those days to keep such discoveries secret.

Another Italian mathematician, Girolamo Cardano (1501-1576) wheedled the method from Tartaglia under a solemn promise of secrecy — and then published it. Cardano did admit he got it from Tartaglia, but not very loudly, and the method for solving cubic equations is still called "Cardano's rule" to this day.

In a way, Cardano was justified. Scientific findings that are known, but not published, are useless to science as a whole. It is the publishing that is now considered crucial, and the credit goes, by general consent, to the first who publishes and not to the first who discovers. The rule did not exist in Cardano's time, but reading it back in time, Cardano should get the credit anyway.

(Naturally, where publication is delayed through no fault of the discoverer, there can be a tragic loss of credit, and there have been a number of such cases in the history of science. That, however, is an unavoidable side-effect of a rule that is, in general, a good one.)

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You can justify Cardano's publication a lot easier than his having broken his promise. In other words, scientists might not actually do anything scientifically dishonest and yet behave in an underhanded way in matters involving science.

The English zoologist, Richard Owen, was, for instance, very much against the Darwinian theory of evolution, largely because Darwin postulated random changes that seemed to deny the existence of purpose in the Universe.

To disagree with Darwin was Owen's right. To argue against Darwinian theory in speech and in writing was also his right. It is sleazy, however, to write on the subject in a number of anonymous articles and in those articles to quote your own work with reverence and approval.

It is always impressive, of course, to cite authorities. It is far less impressive to cite yourself. To appear to do the former when you are really doing the latter is dishonest — even if you yourself are an accepted authority. There's a psychological difference.

Owen also fed rabble-rousers anti-Darwinian arguments and sent them into the fray to make emotional or scurrilous points that he would have been ashamed to make himself.

Another type of flaw arises out of the fact that scientists are quite likely to fall in love with their own ideas. It is always an emotional wrench to have to admit one is wrong. One generally writhes, twists, and turns in an effort to save one's theory, and hangs on to it long after everyone else has given it up.

That is so human, one need scarcely comment on it, but it becomes particularly important to science if the scientist in question has become old, famous and honored.

The prize example is that of the Swedish chemist Jöns Jakob Berzelius (1779-1848), one of the greatest chemists in history, who, in his later years, became a powerful force of scientific conservatism. He had worked up a theory of organic structure from which he would not budge, and from which the rest of the chemical world dared not deviate for fear of his thunders.

The French chemist Auguste Laurent (1807-1853) in 1836 presented an alternate theory we now know to be nearer the truth. Laurent accumulated firm evidence in favor of his theory, and the French chemist Jean Baptiste Dumas (1800-1884) was among those who backed him.

Berzelius counterattacked furiously, and, not daring to place himself in opposition to the great man, Dumas weaseled out of his former support. Laurent, however, held firm and continued to accumulate evidence. For this, he was rewarded by being barred from the more famous laboratories. He is supposed to have contracted tuberculosis as a result of working in poorly-heated provincial

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laboratories and therefore died in middle age.

After Berzelius died, Laurent's theories began to come into fashion, and Dumas, recalling his own early backing of them, now tried to claim more than his fair share of the credit, proving himself rather dishonest after having proved himself rather a coward.

The scientific establishment is so often hard to convince of the value of new ideas that the German physicist, Max Planck (1858-1947) once grumbled that the only way to get revolutionary advances in science accepted was to wait for all the old scientists to die.

Then, too, there is such a thing as over-eagerness to make some discovery. Even the most staunchly honest scientist may be tempted.

Take the case of diamond. Both graphite and diamond are forms of pure carbon. If graphite is compressed very intensely, its atoms will transform into the diamond configuration. The pressure need not be quite as high, if the temperature is raised so that the atoms can move and slip around more easily. How, then, does one get the proper combination of high pressure and high temperature.

The French chemist Ferdinand Frédéric Moissan (1852-1907) undertook the task. It occurred to him that carbon would dissolve to some extent in liquid iron. If the molten iron (at a rather high temperature, of course) were allowed to solidify, it would contract as it did so. The contracting iron might exert a high pressure on the dissolved carbon, and the combination of high temperature and high pressure might do the trick. If the iron were dissolved away, small diamonds might be found in the residue.

We now understand in detail the conditions under which graphite will change to carbon, and we know, beyond doubt, that the conditions of Moissan's experiments were insufficient for the purpose. He could not possibly have produced diamonds.

Except that he did.

In 1893, he exhibited several tiny impure diamonds and a sliver of colorless diamond, over half a millimeter in length, which he said he had manufactured out of graphite.

How was that possible? Could Moissan have been lying? Of what value would that have been to him, since no one could possibly have confirmed the experiment and he himself would know he had lied.

Even so, he might have gone slightly mad on the subject, but most science historians prefer to guess that one of Moissan's assistants introduced the diamonds as a practical joke on the boss. Moissan fell for it, announced it, and the joker could not then back out.

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More peculiar still is the case of the French physicist René Prosper Blondlot (1849-1930).

In 1895, the German physicist Wilhelm Konrad Roentgen (1845-1923) had discovered x-rays and had, in 1901, received the first Nobel Prize in physics. Other strange radiations had been discovered in that period: cathode rays, canal rays, radioactive rays. Such discoveries led on to scientific glory and Blondlot craved for some, which is natural enough.

In 1903, he announced the existence of "N-rays" (which he named in this fashion in honor of the University of Nancy, where he worked). He produced them by placing solids such as hardened steel under strain. The rays could be detected and studied by the fact (Blondlot said) that they brightened a screen of phosphorescent paint, which was already faintly luminous. Blondlot claimed he could see the brightening, and some others said they could see it, too.

The major problem was that photographs didn't show the brightening and that no instrument more objective than the eager human eye upheld the claims of brightening. One day, an on-looker privately pocketed an indispensable part of the instrument Blondlot was using. Blondlot, unaware of this, continued to see the brightening and to "demonstrate" his phenomenon. Finally, the on-looker produced the part and a furious Blondlot attempted to strike him.

Was Blondlot a conscious faker? Somehow I think he was not. He merely wanted to believe something desperately — and he did.

Overeagerness to discover or prove something may actually lead to tampering with the data.

Consider the Austrian botanist, Gregor Mendel (1822-1884), for instance. He founded the science of genetics and worked out, quite correctly, the basic laws of heredity. He did this by crossing strains of green-pea plants and counting the offspring with various characteristics. He thus discovered, for instance, the 3 to 1 ratio in the third generation of the cross of a dominant characteristic with a recessive one.

The numbers he got, in the light of later knowledge, seem to be a little too good, however. There should have been more scattering. Some people think, therefore, that he found excuses for correcting the values that deviated too widely from what he found the general rules to be.

That didn't affect the importance of his discoveries, but the subject matter of heredity comes close to the heart of human beings. We are a lot more interested in the relationship between our ancestors and ourselves than we are in diamonds, invisible radiations, and the structure of organic compounds.

Thus, some people are anxious to give heredity a major portion of the credit

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for the characteristics of individual people and of groups of people; while other are anxious to give that credit to the environment. In general, aristocrats and conservatives lean toward heredity; democrats and radicals lean toward environment.*

Here one's emotions are very likely to be greatly engaged — to the point of believing that one or the other point of views *ought* to be so whether it is so or not. It apparently takes distressingly little, once you begin to think like that, to lean against the data a little bit.

Suppose one is extremely environmental (far more than I myself am). Heredity becomes a mere trifle. Whatever you inherit you can change through environmental influence and pass on to your children, who may again change them and so on. This notion of extreme plasticity of organisms is referred to as "the inheritance of acquired characteristics."

The Austrian biologist, Paul Kammerer (1880-1926) believed in the inheritance of acquired characteristics. Working with salamanders and toads from 1918 onward, he tried to demonstrate this. For instance, there are some species of toads in which the male has darkly-colored thumb-pads. The midwife-toad doesn't, but Kammerer attempted to introduce environmental conditions that would cause the male midwife-toad to develop those dark thumb-pads even though it had not inherited them.

He claimed to have produced such midwife-toads and described them in his papers but would not allow them to be examined closely by other scientists. Some of the midwife-toads were finally obtained by scientists, however, and the thumb pads proved to have been darkened with India ink. Presumably, Kammerer had been driven to do this through the extremity of his desire to "prove" his case. After the exposure, he killed himself.

There are equally strong drives to prove the reverse, to prove that one's intelligence, for instance, is set through heredity and that little can be done in the way of education and civilized treatment to brighten a dumbbell.

This would tend to establish social stability to the benefit of those in the upper rungs of the economic and social ladder. It gives the upper class the comfortable feeling that those of their fellow humans who are in the mud are there because of their own inherited failings and little need be done for them.

One psychologist who was very influential in this sort of view was Cyril Lodowic Burt (1883-1971). English upper class, educated at Oxford, teaching at both Oxford and Cambridge, he studied the IQ of children and correlated those IQs

Since I never pretend to god-like objectivity myself, I tell you right now that I myself lean toward environment.

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with the occupational status of the parents: higher professional, lower professional, clerical, skilled labor, semiskilled labor, unskilled labor.

He found that the IQ fit those occupations perfectly. The lower the parent was in the social scale, the lower the IQ of the child. It seemed a perfect demonstration that people should know their place. Since Isaac Asimov was the son of a shopkeeper, Isaac Asimov should expect (on the average) to be a shopkeeper himself, and shouldn't aspire to compete with his betters.

After Burt's death, however, doubts arose concerning his data. There were distinctly suspicious perfections about his statistics.

The suspicions grew and grew and in the 29 September 1978 issue of *Science*, an article appeared entitled, "The Cyril Burt Question: New Findings" by D. D. Dorfman, a professor of psychology at the University of Iowa. The subtitle of the article reads: "The eminent Briton is shown, beyond reasonable doubt, to have fabricated data on IQ and social class."

And that's it. Burt, like Kammerer, wanted to believe something, so he invented the data to prove it. At least that's what Professor Dorfman concludes.

Back in the January 1975 issue of *F&SF*, before I had any suspicions of wrongdoing in connection with Burt, I had written an essay called "Thinking About Thinking" in which I denounced IQ tests, and expressed my disapproval of those psychologists who thought IQ tests were good enough to determine such things as racial inferiority.

A British psychologist in the forefront of this IQ research was shown the essay by his son, and he was furious. On September 25, 1978, he wrote me a letter in which he insisted that IQ tests were culturally fair and that Blacks fall 12 points below Whites even when environments and educational opportunities are similar. He suggested I stick to things I knew about.

By the time I got the letter I had seen Dorfman's article in *Science* and noted that the psychologist who had written to me had strongly defended Burt against "McCarthyite character assassination." He also had apparently described Burt as "a deadly critic of other people's work when this departed in any way from the highest standards of accuracy and logical consistency" and that "he could tear to ribbons anything shoddy or inconsistent." It would appear, in other words, that not only was Burt dishonest, but he was a hypocrite in the very area of his dishonesty. (That's not an uncommon situation, I think.)

So, in my brief reply to X, I asked him how much of his work was based on the findings of Cyril Burt.

He wrote me a second letter on October 11th. I expected another spirited defense of Burt, but apparently he had grown more cautious concerning him. He

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said, "The question of Burt's work is really quite irrelevant; in my book I have reanalyzed all the available data, leaving out entirely Burt's contribution; it makes no difference to the final conclusion."

In my answer I explained that in my opinion Burt's work was totally relevant. It demonstrated that in the field of heredity versus environment, scientists' emotions could be so fiercely engaged that it was possible for one of them to stoop to falsifying results to prove a point.

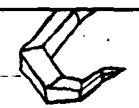
Clearly under such conditions, *any* self-serving results must be taken with a grain of salt.

I'm sure that my correspondent is an honest man, and I would not for the world cast any doubts upon his work. However, the whole field of human intelligence and its measurement is as yet a gray area. There is so much uncertainty in it that it is quite possible to be full of honesty and integrity and yet come up with results of questionable value.

I simply don't think it is reasonable to use IQ tests to produce results of questionable value which may then serve to justify racists in their own mind and to help bring about the kind of tragedies we have already witnessed earlier in this century.

Clearly, my own views are also suspect. I may well be as anxious to prove what I want to prove as ever Burt was, but if I must run the (honest) chance of erring, then I would rather do so in opposition to racism.

And that's that.



SF SEMINAR ABROAD

A Science Fiction Seminar Abroad will be conducted at University College in London, England and at the University of Sussex in Brighton during August, 1979. Attendance at SEACON '79 is part of the program, as well as informal social hours with British sf writers and critics. For information and a brochure write Dr. Marshall B. Tymn, English Department, Eastern Michigan University, Ypsilanti, MI 48197; or call 313-487-0155.

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Here is a polished thriller which happens to be one of the best stories about genetic manipulation that we've ever read.

The Relic

BY

GARY JENNINGS

Summa Theologica, ca. 1273

Whoever loves another does honor to that which remains after death. On this account it is our duty to pay honor to the relics of the dead, especially to the body, which was the temple and dwelling of the Holy Ghost, in which He dwelt and worked, and which in the Resurrection is to be made like to the body of Christ.

Athens, Greece, 1978 (AP)

Greek Orthodox monks on Mount Sinai have made public announcement of a major find of early Christian texts they discovered by accident in their St. Catherine's Monastery two years ago. "It could be the most important find since the Dead Sea Scrolls," a Salonika University professor told Associated Press.

He said the thousands of parchment and papyrus fragments, dating back to the early years of Christianity, include at least one real sensation — eight missing pages from the Codex Sinaiticus, an ancient and priceless manuscript now in the British Museum.

Rome, Italy, March 31, 1979

"We," said the middle-aged man, though he was alone in the luxuriously appointed office, "have taken cognizance of all things pertinent to this proposed project." He pressed the pause button of his desk tape recorder, sighed, then continued in a husky voice:

"We have pondered upon the nature of the relic long revered by our Belgian brothers in the estimable city of Bruges. We have examined copies of the texts discovered not long ago in the

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Sinai. Though not without trepidation, we have discussed with the Pontifical Academy of Sciences the latest advances in biological experimentation. We have taken heed of Saint Thomas Aquinas' admonitions concerning the honor rightly to be paid to certain relics in expectation of the Resurrection. With exceedingly strenuous and devout supplication, we have prayed for guidance in this unprecedented undertaking proposed to us."

He paused again and used a fine linen handkerchief to wipe perspiration from his domed forehead.

"We believe the decision has been made, not by us, but for us. Now therefore, with the authority apostolic, and adjuring to utmost secrecy the recipients of these instructions, we hereby command...."

Rome, April 2

"...we hereby command that the project be implemented exactly as proposed." All the foregoing had been in Latin. The husky voice now said abruptly in Italian, *"Destrugge questo cassetto, piu presto."* There was a final click, and silence.

"Destroy immediately," repeated the older of the two elderly men listening to the tape. "I'll burn it myself." He pressed the eject button of his desk recorder and tucked the cassette into a fold of his red robes.

"I don't understand," said the other man, the one wearing purple robes. "How can His —?"

"Favore, no titles, no personal identifications. Bugs abound, perhaps even here in my chambers. We are enjoined to secrecy, and that will necessitate circumlocution. As for the source of our instructions, let us henceforth refer to The Elder."

"Very well. But I don't understand how The Elder can pursue this impetuous adventure. From the time of Galileo, our — our Elders have looked askance on any coalition of the Church and the more radical sciences."

"Only when those sciences have controverted dogma," said the man in red, "and this adventure transcends any *non placet* I know of."

"But why now?" persisted the man in purple. "That relic has been cosseted in Bruges for more than eight hundred years. I might even say it has been something of an embarrassment for that long. Certainly it has never been authenticated.

"Several things are happening simultaneously these days, and The Elder does not believe in what crass materialists call coincidence. He believes this concatenation of recent events is *Deo gratia* — evidence of divine causation."

"What recent events?"

"They are three. One, the numerous breakthroughs in those biological sciences concerned with genetic manipulation. Two, the existence of that moot relic in Bruges...."

"Hardly recent," said the other, with a sniff.

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"No, but its authentication would be."

"What?"

"Because of event number three. The discovery of those ancient scriptural texts — especially the long-missing pages of the Codex Sinaiticus. One of the revelations we cannot long keep secret is that the Codex pages describe the burial of Our Lord Jesus Christ by the man Joseph of Arimathea."

"Well? So do the books of Mark, Matthew, John...."

"These pages give rather copious details of Joseph's ministrations. They could be interpreted as a validation of that old Brugeois relic you have called an 'embarrassment' to the Church."

"Salve!" gasped the man in purple. "And now we're commanded to — to procure that relic. And in total secrecy. But *how?*"

"The Church must not be involved, cannot be even remotely suspect. Fortunately, we have loyal laymen of great distinction and greater ingenuity." The man in red flicked on his tape recorder and said, "A letter, on my personal stationery, *al Sagro Consiglio, Priorato Principale, Ordine Sovrane di Cavalieri....*"

Rome, April 3

"The Sovereign Order of the Knights Hospitallers of Jerusalem is at your command, Your —"

"Favore, no titles, no personal identifications," said the man in red. "You brought my letter, *signore?*"

"But, yes," said the elderly Consigliere of the Grand Priory of the Knights. He was uncomfortably dressed in the gaudy medieval costume of his Sovereign Order. "It was necessary to bring the letter to gain audience with Your — ulp — with the *signore.*"

"Good. Give it here." The man in the red robes burned the letter in a large ashtray on his desk. The Consigliere watched, puzzled, while the ashes were mashed to powder, then ventured to say:

"Your letter contained little to burn, *signore.* Only the command that I attend. It did not say why."

"I wish to ask a question or two. Your Knights Hospitallers once held considerable power in Jerusalem and later throughout Christendom. Your Order has a branch in the city of Bruges, in Belgium, does it not?"

"Sí, signore."

"Also in Bruges reposes a relic — a reputed relic — known as the Holy Blood, which the city originally obtained — reputedly obtained — from Jerusalem. Tell me all you know about it."

The other old man took a minute to marshal his thoughts. Then he said, "It was late on the Friday of the Crucifixion when Our Lord was finally taken down from the cross. Sundown was approaching, and with it the Sabbath of the Jews. Since no work — not even gravedigging — is done on the Sabbath, the corporeal remains of the Savior must have lain barbarically unbur-

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ied for at least another day, except for the intervention of one kindly Jew...."

"Joseph of Arimathea."

"*Si, signore.* He obtained permission from Pilate to remove the mutilated corpse and seek for it a burial place. According to some stories, Joseph was a wealthy man and he lodged Our Lord's body in the elaborate tomb which he, Joseph, had already had built for himself. In other accounts, he merely found a convenient cave on the Mount of Golgotha."

"Either way, he was indisputably the last human being to touch the body of Jesus Christ. That is, before the women found the tomb empty and the Christ risen."

"Oh, indisputably. And it is said that Joseph captured in a phial a drop — perhaps some few drops — of Jesus' blood. It is further said that the reliquary phial remained for some centuries in the keeping of the later Christian Metropolitans of Jerusalem. As to how and when that phial supposedly got to Bruges, I confess I am woefully uninformed. But surely the Vatican Library...."

"Let us assume that I do not wish the Vatican librarian to know of my interest in the subject."

"I see," said the Consigliere. "Then I can make inquiries of my brother Knights in Bruges."

"I would be obliged. I want to know the history of the relic, its present whereabouts, the particulars of its size and appearance, the provisions for its safekeeping, its accessibility to the public...."

"For all that, *signore*, my informants will probably have to query the traditional guardians of the relic, the Fraternitas Nobilis Sanguinem Sanctus."

"Have them do so, but discreetly. Perhaps one Knight, disguised as a busybody tourist, could feign an accidental encounter with one of that Noble Brotherhood of the Holy Blood."

"An excellent suggestion, *signore*. I will arrange it. *Con permesso.*"

Bruges, Belgium, April 5

A middle-aged man, inconspicuous in garish tourist attire, complete to Instamatic camera looped around his wrist, sat nibbling Wingene cheese and sipping a tall stein of Flemish ale at a sidewalk table of the Café de la Bourse. From across the cobbled Grand' Place came the music of the carillon in the towering Belfry — a few bars of a Mozart aria — signaling the quarter past two o'clock of the unseasonably mild spring afternoon.

"*Ah, la bonne Bruges vieillotes,*" the man sighed rapturously. "The most unchanged, most unspoiled medieval city in all of Europe. The dear old Belfry, the crowstep-gabled houses, the tranquil canals, their humpbacked bridges, their drifting white swans...."

"The nauseous and clamorous motor traffic. *Hélas*, some things do change," said his newly met companion at the table, who was, not coinci-

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dentally, a member of the Noble Brotherhood of the Holy Blood. "Our tranquil canals are now so polluted by sewage that the traditional Brugeois swans long ago went elsewhere. The swans you see today are of painted wood, put afloat in the canals by the city fathers for tourists like yourself to photograph." Not quite disdainfully, he indicated the other's Instamatic. "But, *grâce à dieu*, some things do not change. You were asking, for instance, about the Holy Blood. That most precious relic ever to come out of the Holy Land remains and will always remain in Bruges."

"But why Bruges?" asked the tourist. "I should have thought that such a treasure would have been acquired by the Vatican Museum, or accorded a chapel in Saint Peter's."

"It was not presented to Mother Church, but to a layman like you and myself — albeit of a higher class — the then Count of Flanders."

"Why? When?"

"He was the Comte Thierry d'Alsace, who led the Flemish contingent of the Second Crusade. As you may know, that Crusade was rather a dismal failure. Nevertheless, the Comte d'Alsace personally made such a brave showing that, before the Crusaders retreated to Europe in the year 1150, the Metropolitan of Jerusalem made him a gift of the phial containing a drop of the Holy Blood. Thierry chained it around the neck of his chaplain, and that worthy priest never removed it, day or night, during the whole of the march back to Bruges. And here the Count presented it to the city. It still belongs to the city, not to the Church."

The tourist smiled. "Perhaps, then, it is from jealousy that the Church has never seen fit to authenticate your relic."

"Perhaps. In any event, whenever the priest removes it from its vault in the Chapel of the Holy Blood, at least one Brugeois policeman is present as representative of the civil authority. Plus, of course, one or several of us guardian Brothers. If, *monsieur*, you can extend your vacation until the Monday after the second day of May, you will see the Holy Relic carried through the streets of Bruges in a resplendent medieval procession."

The tourist looked slightly dismayed. "And otherwise it is kept locked in a chapel vault? Yes, I had hoped to see the Holy Blood. But is the May procession the only occasion on which the relic is publicly displayed?"

"*Mais non, m'sieu.* The Chapel of the Holy Blood is on the next street, almost directly behind this very café. At Friday Mass — and tomorrow is Friday — you may see the relic. Indeed, you may kiss it."

"*Kiss it?*"

"Of a surety. It was on a Friday that Our Lord bled on the Cross. Therefore, at the Chapel's every Friday Mass, if you take Communion, besides partaking of Christ's body and blood in the form of a sacramental wafer,

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you are enabled to kiss the phial containing the veritable blood itself."

The next day, when he went to Mass, the Knight Hospitaller carried not the obtrusive Instamatic camera but a tiny and invisibly concealed Minox.

Rome, April 7

"That most precious relic ever to come out of the Holy Land," scoffed the old man in the purple robes. He was reading from the Knight's report. "They kiss this object when they partake of the Host. They transport it in a grandiose annual procession. They are guilty of rank superstition, if not idolatry!"

"Tut-tut. I have checked the Rituale Romanum," the older, red-robed man said absently. "Their parade is officially a *processio in quacunque tribulatione*, hence permissible." He was minutely scrutinizing, through a jeweler's loupe, the sheaf of photographs the Knight had sent. "Anyway, you'd better not sneer. It is hardly idolatry if the relic turns out to be the real thing."

The other man shuddered in spite of himself. "If it is," he whispered, "and if we do with it what has been proposed...."

"*If* we can get hold of it," said the man in red. "Let's concentrate on first problems first. Look at this photograph."

It showed the ornate dais of Bruges' Chapel of the Holy Blood. Behind the dais stood a jowly priest, holding reverently in both hands the disputed phial. On his right stood a guard of the Fraternitas Nobilis Sanguinem Sanctus, an aged and totally bald gentleman in ceremonial robes of black, silver and scarlet, grasping a candle-stick mace of office. To the left of the priest stood a stolid Belgian policeman, wearing the standard blue uniform and (even in church) the standard white helmet.

Under the loupe, the reliquary held by the priest showed as a transparent cylinder, about the size of a straight-sided water glass. At either end it was closed by an intricately engraved gold cap. To each cap was fastened one end of a two-meter loop of stout silver chain, and that loop passed around the back of the priest's plump neck.

"There's a reflection on the glass," complained the man in purple. "I can't see inside the phial."

The man in red handed him another photograph, either a daringly close-up snap or a vividly clear blow-up print. It showed the phial's wall to be rather thicker than that of any water glass. At the bottom center of the transparent cylinder was not a red blob or even a droplet but an indistinct red-brown smudge.

"With all due and devout respect," said the man in purple, "I must say it appears a trifling trophy for us to be — appropriating. But never mind. How do we appropriate it?"

"Substitution," said the man in red. "I already have a trusted goldsmith in

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the Via da Guardiagreli working on a copy. He says he can see the goldwork clearly enough in the photographs to imitate the caps' engraving faultlessly. The same for the silver chain. And the priest's hands in the picture give him the scale. Ours will be a perfect duplicate, in size, in appearance, in every respect."

"A perfect duplicate," said the purple-robed man, his voice hushed. "In every respect."

Paris, France, April 10

Seated in the back of the Citroën patrol car, handcuffed between two policemen, the elegantly tailored and eminently distinguished-looking gentleman did not struggle, but he protested vociferously. "I demand to know on what warrant you *salauds* are acting!" He quieted when the car halted, not before any arrondissement commissariat but at the Gothic front door of a residence he knew well.

"By the blue," he said, when the policemen had delivered him and withdrawn themselves. "I have been arrested many times, but never before by my own parish priest. What in the world did I say at my last confession?"

"You merely reminded me," said the priest, "that my congregation includes the most illustrious criminal ever to afflict Paris since the heyday of Cartouche. Now I ask you, for once in your life, to put your talents and contacts to one commendable use. Look at these photographs. And listen."

When the priest had finished, the man expostulated, "But this — this substitution you require. Father, I am only a simple pickpocket."

"*Merde,*" the priest said bluntly. "The snot-nosed brat I rescued so often from the Montesson reformatory farm was a pickpocket. Your skills have enlarged over the years."

"Naturally I will do anything for you, Father. But the city of Bruges is outside your parish. So I conclude you are not making a personal request. May I inquire why the Church seeks to enlist the aid of a Barabbas?"

"*Non.*"

"Ah?" The gang chief shrugged, then studied the photographs again. "You say no one must know of the substitution. That rules out cracking the Chapel vault; it could not be done without leaving some trace. It also rules out any action when the phial is brought out for Mass; too risky in such close quarters. It must be done during that Procession of the Holy Blood. A parade always entails enough commotion that a little more won't matter. I must say, though, that I seldom manifest such audacity in broad daylight and before so many witnesses."

"Be glad, then, that this is 1979."

"Eh?"

"It is *only* a procession," said the priest. "If this were 1977, the relic would not be just paraded. In each quinary year, it is the focus of a magnificent *son et lumière* Passion Play. The drama lasts for nearly three hours, in-

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volves nearly three thousand actors and musicians, and the Grand' Place is jammed with more than ten thousand spectators. Torchlights, floodlights, bonfires...."

"Of a truth? Hm. That *would* be a challenge."

"Do not entertain any vainglorious notions! We will not wait for 1982. The substitution must be effected as soon as possible. If you choose the procession day, that will be — let's see — the seventh of May this year."

"Which gives me less than a month to plan. Father, I shall need a large-scale map of Bruges, with the route accurately plotted. I shall need details of the procession: order of march, bands and floats, and all that sort of thing. Details of the spectator barricades, security arrangements, the *fonctionnaires* and traffic policemen keeping order. Above all, details as to where and how the relic is carried. If it is the *pièce de résistance*, I trust it will be highly visible."

"All that data will be procured for you. But I believe the Archbishop of Utrecht rides in a fancy little chair, holding the phial high for all to behold."

"*Merde.*"

"That poses a problem?"

"Father, I can lift top-secret microfilms from a zippered money belt worn beneath the thermal underwear of a KGB or CIA agent, and he will not notice. I can lift the brand-new wedding ring off the tender finger of a newly-wed bride, and she will not notice. But observe. The Archbishop will be riding above head level. And the relic is not just held in his two hands, it is also secured by a chain running around the Archbishop's reverend neck."

"So?"

"So I cannot lift. The Archbishop will have to stand on his head."

Rome, April 12

"With nothing but the photographs to go by," said the old man in purple, "I must say it seems an identical copy to *me.*" Somewhat gingerly, he turned the cylinder over and over in his fingers.

"The only thing we can't be sure about is the weight," said the old man in red. "We duplicated the wall thickness as closely as possible. And, assuming that the real reliquary is as sumptuous as it deserves to be, the goldsmith used 18-karat gold for the cylinder ends and .999 sterling for the chain. But even if the real one is made of, say, cheaper 14-karat gold and coinage-grade .975 silver, I doubt that even a custodian who has handled it every Friday of his life will know the difference."

"What about the — the blood?" asked the purple-robed man, indicating the rusty smudge inside the phial. "I mean to say, suppose someone else gets the idea of trying our daredevil enterprise again someday?"

"If ours succeeds, no one else ever need try. Anyway, that blood was put

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in there for me by a make-up artist from Cinecittà. Whatever it is they use in those gory films. Tinted chocolate syrup, I believe he said."

"Shouldn't we perhaps have an extra copy of this object for — what do they call it? — backup? Isn't there some risk that either this or the real phial could accidentally get shattered during the exchange?"

"Not much chance. The real one is made of lead crystal — not window glass — and so is this."

"Ah, well, if one gets broken, you and I had better make an immediate and lifelong retreat to a monastery in Patagonia or somewhere."

"Don't start packing just yet. We have a good man in charge of the substitution procedure."

"Who?"

"I don't know and won't ask. All I know is that Paris is the most sophisticatedly wicked city in the world, and my nephew has a church in the Latin Quarter, which is the wickedest part of that wickedest city. He has recruited one of his parishioners — a Mafia don or someone of the sort. Anyway, the man appears to know his business. The first thing he demanded was all this information." He waved a hand at the papers on the table between them.

The man in purple picked up the street plan of Bruges. "This would be the procession route?"

"Yes. Rather tortuous, isn't it? I daresay the paraders are glad that the Old City occupies such a small oval. But, even so, they must be footsore toward the end. They depart from the Chapel of the Holy Blood — here — around the block and past the Belfry in the Grand' Place, then up and down all those other streets, through all those other squares, all the way out to the Béguinage convent. Then back again, past the Belfry again, finally home to the Chapel at the finish."

"I would guess they require a lengthy route just to accommodate the lengthy cortege," said the purple-robed man. "I can't imagine who *watches* the procession; every single living Brugeois seems to be *in* it." He read aloud from a paper:

"Trumpeters and drummers.

"Flag flourishers.

"Mounted Crusaders, bearing pennons and lances.

"The Clergy, in copes.

"Choristers, in surplices.

"Dismounted guard of the Noble Brotherhood of the Holy Blood.

"The Archbishop of Utrecht, bearing the Holy Relic, his chair of honor borne by the younger and sturdier members of the Sovereign Order of the Knights Hospitallers of Jerusalem.

"Dismounted guard of the Royal and Princely Guild of the Honorable Crossbowmen of Saint George.

"Bagpipers. *(Bagpipers?)*

"Lay magistrates, professional men, members of trade and craft guilds, each guild with its band of musicians.

"Monks.

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"Nuns.

"Children."

"And, at one point in the performance," said the red-robed man, "the Archbishop stands on his head."

"What? The Archbishop of Utrecht? That pompous and arthritic old —?"

"Perhaps my nephew got his cipher garbled, but that's what his coded telegram said."

"Per Bacco!" exclaimed the man in purple, invoking a god whose existence he was supposed to repudiate. "That, I'd like to see myself!"

Bruges, April 16

While still some distance apart, the two men exchanged hand signals which no passerby could possibly have noticed, but which established their mutual identification. Then they converged on an empty table at the sidewalk café of the Hôtel Le Panier d'Or, sat down together and ordered flagons of beer.

"It is indeed an honor, for us who know your reputation," said the younger man, "to have you visiting our humbly rustic city of Bruges, Monsieur —"

"Barabbas, for the occasion."

"Monsieur Barabbas, it is even more of an honor for me, that I have been chosen to assist —"

"We have not leisure to exchange bouquets. That is the Belfry across the Place, is it not? And the procession passes it twice?"

"Oui," said the other, smartly. "At the beginning, it crosses from right to left. At the conclusion, some two hours later, it crosses from left to right."

"The Archbishop in his litter is the center of attention. And his chair is followed" — the man consulted a pocket notebook — "followed by a guild of old men known as the Honorable Crossbowmen of Saint George. They actually carry crossbows?"

"Oui."

"Real crossbows? That really shoot, I mean?"

"Oui. They fire a short bolt called a quarrel."

"Are these old bastards proficient with the weapons?"

"Oui. Exceedingly so. They are continually holding contests and competitions and public shows of their skill. Up to about sixty yards' range, a crossbow quarrel is as accurate as a bullet from any sniper rifle." The young man cleared his throat. *"Pardon,* Monsieur Barabbas, but I was not told that this is to be a contract job."

"It isn't!" snapped the other. "Simply answer my questions — without conjecture — or prepare for a lifetime career as an assistant pimp on Hamburg's Reeperbahn."

"Oui, m'sieu," said the younger, beginning to sweat.

"Bien. Now I need either access to the Archbishop's litter chair or some means of constructing an exact duplicate. Which?"

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"You can see the actual chair, Monsieur Barabbas, right yonder in the storeroom of the Belfry. The docent will be thrilled that a tourist takes an interest."

While the mummified docent mumbled toothlessly in Flemish about the chair's history, ancestry, dimensions and general opulence, the two men stood and eyed it. It was thronelike, covered with a rich gold and white brocade, and affixed to two carrying poles long enough for four men on a side. The construction was commendably solid, the whole having been put together with old-fashioned wooden pegs, not nails or screws. The man who called himself Barabbas patted the brocade, and it emitted a small cloud of year-old dust.

"No fear, *mynheer,*" said the ancient attendant (the younger man translating). "Each year, some days before the procession, an artisan is engaged to examine the litter in every particular. To do any necessary tightening of the construction, to clean the upholstery, to darn it if required...."

"But what is this?" asked Barabbas, bending over the chair's padded seat. Lying across it was a buckled lap belt, brocaded on the upper surface where it would show, but underneath a homely strap of leather.

"A seat belt," said the younger man. "Like in an airplane."

"How remarkably thoughtful," the other said to himself.

"Ah, well," said the docent, shrugging with upraised palms. "Even the younger Knights who carry the chair, *mynheer,* are not *that* young. And most of our streets are cobbled. It can happen, toward the end of the procession, when the bearers tire, that one may stumble — even faint and fall. Should the chair lurch, it must not dislodge the Archbishop. He may be jolted for an instant, but he will not drop the Holy Blood."

"All right," said Barabbas, as he and his assigned aide left the Belfry and dodged through the traffic on the Grand' Place. "It will be necessary to bribe four men, and bribe them munificently. The man who tends that chair before the procession. Two of the Knights who bear it. And one of the Crossbowmen who march behind it. Can this be done?"

"Anybody can be bribed to do anything," said the aide, as if quoting Holy Writ. He dared to add, "It would be well if we could give them some cover reason for such heavy bribes."

"Tell them we are rich Americans playing a prank."

"A prank?"

"Anything will be believed of an American. And you often have clowns in your processions, *hein?* I read of them on the train, in a pamphlet about Belgian festivals."

"True, but in *holiday* processions, not *Holy* Day. You doubtless read of that most famous prankster of all time, Tijl Uilenspiegel, and his — how do you say? sidekick? — Lamme Goed-

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zak. Most people believe the mischievous Tijl to be a mere fable, but he actually once existed. He is even buried here in Flanders, at —"

"But he *is* still personated in parades? He and his sidekick?"

"*Oui*, and they still play pranks. Like throwing eggshells full of indelible dyes. For those festivals, the paraders and spectators wear their oldest rags and tatters. But —"

"There are special costumes for Tijl Uilenspiegel and Lamme Goedzak?"

"*Oui*. They dress something like old-time court jesters. There are photographs aplenty. We can easily make copies."

"We won't risk the seamstresses here wondering why. I'll have them run up in Paris."

"But — forgive my insistence, Monsieur Barabbas — pranksters would be egregiously out of place. This is a solemn *religious* procession."

"Then we won't intrude on its first crossing of the Place here. But after two hours of trudging, the paraders ought to welcome a bit of diversion. We'll make our move at the close, when the procession returns past the Belfry. I will be Tijl Uilenspiegel and you will be Lamme Goedzak."

Paris, April 17

"Masquerade costumes, *oui*, I can comprehend," said the priest into the telephone. "But *eggshells....?*"

* * *

Rome, April 18

"Eggshells being provided," said the red-robed man, wonderingly, as he decoded his nephew's telegram. "Full of *colored inks...?*"

Bruges, May 7

The great Triumph bell of the Belfry boomed portentously, and trumpets blared a fanfare from the Belfry's topmost turret.

From the second-story balcony of the Chapel of the Holy Blood, a jowly priest held high the reliquary and intoned a prayer "for the peace and unity of the Church, for His Holiness the Pope, for the Clergy of the Holy Roman Catholic Church, for all ranks and conditions of men, for our gracious sovereign King Baudouin, for catechumens, for the sick and afflicted, for heretics and schismatics, for the Jew and the heathen...." Then he gave the reliquary into the gnarled hands of the Archbishop, ceremoniously helped the old man loop the chain about his neck ... and thus began the Procession of the Holy Blood, now in its 829th year.

It began uneventfully, most of the marchers marking time in place while the fore contingents slowly separated and paced away from the Chapel front, around the street corner toward the Grand' Place, trumpeters blowing and drummers rat-a-tatting with vigor, banners snapping crisply in the May breeze, choristers singing so sweetly that they were almost drowned out by the skirling bagpipes.

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The Place had been completely cleared both of moving traffic and of the immobile phalanxes of parked cars. Here, every photographer and TV cameraman from all the news media of Belgium (and elsewhere) danced and leapt and crouched about the procession, getting their obligatory shots against the scenic backdrop of the Belfry. Then they all dashed off to their cars and Mobile Units in side streets and away to meet their several deadlines — and so missed the unexpected "human interest angle" that came later.

The amateur and tourist photographers didn't. They waited, jammed in place, to snap and whir their cameras again when the procession came back to the Place two hours later, moving rather more slowly and making music rather less exuberantly. As the Archbishop's chair bobbed majestically past the Belfry's entrance staircase, there was a jostling among the crowd on the opposite side of the Place. One of the parade's bagpipes gave a more than usually unearthly screech, as its piper's head jerked and turned suddenly a brilliant ink-blue.

Two men, no more than a blur of electric green and red motley, vaulted the sawhorse barricade lining the processional path, their arms windmilling as they plucked the eggshell grenades from their shoulder sacks and lobbed them in all directions. There was consternation among the paraders, who, for this occasion, were not clad in dispensable clothes; they were wearing costumes either painstakingly recreated at considerable cost or carefully hoarded and mended and remended, perhaps for centuries. The marchers broke ranks, the spectators began to mill in place, and the Grand' Place resounded with shrieks, shouts and irreligious curses. Many people present missed seeing what happened next.

Of the eight Knights Hospitallers bearing the Archbishop's litter, the two just behind and on either side of his chair reached up and jerked loose the specially re-whittled pegs from their carrying poles. Hinged on only its two forward supporting pegs, the throne toppled backward. The old man's legs flew into the air. So did his miter. Any man, even an Archbishop, even secured by a lap strap, when unexpectedly somersaulted backward, will grab for extra support. The Archbishop had been holding the Holy Blood aloft. When he let go of it to clutch the arms of his chair, the reliquary seemed to hang in the air for a moment before it dropped past him, and the loop of chain slipped off his neck and head.

The cylinder and its chain landed on the cobblestones directly beneath the upside-down Archbishop's bulging eyes, with a clink and tinkle that perhaps only he heard. Then (he said afterward) he could swear he heard another and louder clash of metal on stone — and a flare of sparks — as the holy object suddenly whisked sideways out of his sight, among the feet of the crowd.

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"But the Brugeois are a good and godly folk," he told the reporters who hurried back to midtown. "Anywhere else, a vandal might easily have snatched up and kept the Holy Blood as a — God save us — souvenir. But when the Knights, with profuse apologies, carefully let me down to the ground and righted my chair, an honest burgher was right there at my side, reverently holding and returning to me the Holy Relic unharmed. Now" — and his trembly voice got stern — "I only await word that those two sacrilegious mischief-makers have been apprehended. The Brugeois police assure me that an arrest can be expected momentarily."

Alitalia Flight 401, Rome-Munich, May 10

"This has already cost a king's ransom," grumbled the man who did not today wear purple robes, but a charcoal-gray civilian suit. He slapped the attaché case resting on his lap. "And now — *now* we're to commit ourselves to an infinitely unlimited further expense."

"But if The Elder is right?" asked the man in the adjacent seat, today attired in a powder-blue civilian suit. "If this *has* all been divinely instigated? You wouldn't think it worth seeing through to the denouement?" He took a tighter grip on his flight bag as the Airbus curtsied gently to an air pocket.

"I cannot and would not criticize The Elder's decision," said his companion. "But look at it this way. There are more than thirty Holy Nails still preserved as relics. If they were all authentic, Our Crucified Lord would have looked like those porcupine pictures of Saint Sebastian. Or take the True Cross, for another example. In Catholic churches and shrines around the world, there are now enough fragments of the True Cross to build another Noah's Ark."

"We have our orders," said the man who customarily wore a red robe. "And our Faith."

Munich, West Germany, May 11

The doctor's office on the Mandlstrasse was austerely furnished, perhaps deliberately so, the better to display its picture-window view of the Englischer Garten's vast parkland beyond. The doctor's desktop was empty but for a pen, a notebook and an inexplicable small square of plate glass curiously daubed with shiny black ink.

"Es ist hier," said the man in the powder-blue suit. He opened his flight bag, took out the gold-capped crystal phial (now relieved of its chain) and laid it on the desk.

"Ohne Zweifel," the doctor said coolly, eyeing the smear inside the glass. The conversation continued in German.

"We hope," said the blue-suited man, indicating the relic, "that will be a sufficient, er, specimen for you to work with."

"Ja, in a single corpuscle there are

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multitudes of cells. A single blood drop can enable experiments enough to occupy the rest of my life. Now — Herr Schmidt, Herr Braun," he said, nodding to each of the two men in turn. "Our correspondence has been copious, but let us be sure we understand each other completely. You say your, er, friend died untimely — before he could finish an important work in which he was engaged. You wish that work continued. For my part, I can promise nothing. The technology involved is still in its own embryo stages. I can but try — and devote my full time and energy to it — but I cannot begin to estimate the cost."

Herr Braun, the man in the charcoal-gray suit, opened his attaché case. He took out, one at a time, a number of paper-taped packets of bills and stacked them on the desk. "There you have one million Deutsche marks to begin with."

"A handsome retainer," the doctor conceded. "For a retainer. On the other hand, it is just about enough to buy *one* electron-scanning microscope. You cannot possibly conceive of the equipment, supplies and personnel I must have for this work."

Herr Braun added another stack of sheaved bills to the desk. "Two million Deutsche marks," he said. "We thought it imprudent to travel with more cash than that. But you have only to ask for more. Your every draft will be honored. The funds at your disposal are and will be unlimited."

This seemed to impress even the imperturbably glacial doctor. "Unlimited? I can rely on that?"

"Absolutely. We realize you can give no guarantee of success, but we have faith — that is, our principles have confidence in your credentials, and they will not stint on the resources required. *Their* exchequer is unlimited."

"May I inquire, *mein Herren*, do you represent one of the great transnational companies? Or perhaps a royal family?"

Herr Schmidt chuckled. "We could say yes to either question, *Herr Doktor*, and your surmise would still be far from the truth. The one condition specified is that total anonymity and secrecy be observed."

"May I at least know the name of the deceased?"

Herr Schmidt shook his head. "Not applicable."

"Very well. N/A." The doctor made a note. "But there are some case-history details which I really should have. I know the subject was male. What was his age at demise?"

"We think thirty-three. Give or take a couple of years."

"Close enough. And the date of demise?"

"N/A," said Herr Braun.

"*Ach*, come now. I appreciate the need for anonymity, but —"

"He did not die recently," said Herr Braun, "and that brings up a question which troubles us. Troubles me, any-

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way," he added, with a sidewise glance at Herr Schmidt. "You can certainly tell from that blood smear, *Herr Doktor*, that we have not come here directly from our friend's deathbed. Since he died some time ago, wouldn't those blood cells all have died by now, as well?"

"Dying," the doctor began didactically, "is a layman's word, and imprecise...."

"An excellent way to state it," murmured Herr Schmidt. He steepled his fingers and smiled beatifically over them. The doctor gave him a quizzical look and went on:

"I hardly need cite the numerous occasions when human life has been prosthetically prolonged after one or several vital organs have, as you put it, died. However, as regards the case in point, let me simply say that the cells in this smudge of blood need not still be warm and motile. Think of them as computer program cards. No matter how old and desiccated, each cell still contains its genetic 'bits' of information. Any one of them, implanted in a living and fertile ovum, will trigger that ovum into mitosis — cell division — in short, growth. And that growth will be programmed by the trigger cell's 'computer bits' of information. Everything from eye color to IQ. I speak, of course, of an ideally successful experiment. To date, such successes have been attained only in the lower animal orders, not yet in the human."

"You did mention," said Herr Braun, "that you have already achieved certain limited ends. Otherwise we would not be here."

"I will show you the result of one experiment," said the doctor, and pressed a button somewhere under his desktop.

A nurse entered the office, shepherding before her a young boy. The child shyly approached the desk and the three men.

"Just to prove he is not a *Doppelgänger*," said the doctor. He slid that odd square of glass and his notebook toward the boy and said sharply, "Thumb, Hansel." The boy slowly and deliberately raised his right hand, pressed his thumb onto the inked glass and then onto the open page of the notebook. The doctor did the same, then slid the notebook across to his clients. The Herren Schmidt and Braun bent over the two thumbprints and adjusted their trifocals. One print was, of course, larger than the other, but it took no expert — not even a magnifying glass — to see that the loops and whorls of both prints were identical.

"Amazing," breathed Herr Braun. He stared narrowly from the face of the boy to that of the doctor and added, "Uncanny. The resemblance."

"*Ja*," said the doctor. "I began with a single cell taken from the mucous membrane of the inside of my lip."

"And yet," Herr Schmidt put in. "And yet — there is something subtly *wrong* about his appearance."

"Unfortunately so," said the doc-

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[redacted]tor. He told the nurse to take Hans back to his room. When they were gone, he said, "You observed the slant of the eyes, the strangely small ears, the other minor but significant distortions in his replication of my features. What a physician knows as Down's syndrome; what is popularly called Mongolianism. The boy is a Mongoloid idiot. He is now six years old, but has the mind of an infant of three. By the time his intelligence reaches a six-year level, Hans will be about nineteen — and probably dead. Mongoloids seldom live beyond their late teens."

The Herren sat silent, more than a bit shocked by the doctor's clinically callous prognosis.

"To my scientific colleagues, what I have already accomplished is epochal," the doctor went on. "To you, it is impractical and insufficient. Your friend left his work unfinished when he died at thirty-three. You will want him to live somewhat past that age. And an idiot of any age would scarcely be of use to you." He spread his hands. "Obviously, we still have far to go to perfect the programming, so to speak. Need I remark, *mein Herren*, that neither of you will live to see the culmination, whatever it may be?"

"That is of no matter," said Herr Schmidt. "Our principals will. And the contract terms will survive us. Your freedom to experiment as you will, supported by whatever funds you require, and with no time limit imposed."

"*Sehr gut.* And you will be kept advised — via that accommodation address — of every least development." The doctor picked up the relic and casually examined the intricate gold engraving. "As I have told you, the experiment begins quite literally in a test tube. When and if mitosis is achieved, then comes the transplant to the womb of the host-mother. I prefer, for the sake of safety in the delivery, to use a multipara — that is, a woman who has already borne at least one child." His gray eyes twinkled frostily. "Unless, when that auspicious moment comes, your principals insist I engage a virgin."

Lufthansa Flight 312, Munich-Rome, May 12

"I am still uneasy," said Herr Braun to Herr Schmidt. "Granted, those rediscovered pages of the Codex Sinaiticus affirm that Joseph of Arimathea did indeed bottle and preserve a drop of Jesus' blood. But I suggest that Joseph did not have a handsome crystal phial handy — nor did he lavish goldwork on it. And that phial lay in Jerusalem for more than a millennium before it was given to the Brugeois Crusader. Then, during its eight hundred years in Bruges, it has been often in peril. Hidden away in common cottage walls during two world wars in this century. Who knows how many times before? During nearly two thousand years, there have been innumerable chances for it to have been stolen or

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lost or broken — and another phial substituted for it. Or, if not that, the original Holy Blood could long ago have evaporated or bleached away to nothing and been replaced by a different drop. Good Lord, suppose the doctor is working with the blood of some Jerusalem nonentity, some executed felon, some medieval witch! Suppose it's an animal's blood! Suppose it's something like beetroot juice!"

Herr Schmidt said only, and serenely, "Suppose it isn't."

A LULLABY, A FAREWELL

Against night's high flakes, snow
trembles on twigs by the pasture wall.
I trundle in my boots across the fields.
If you were here, I'd point to the sky.
You sleep bunched like snow, a long line
of caribou walks by your pillow,
antlers branched against night skies.

The Heavenly River courses overhead,
felicitous as steadfast friends.
You can forget the summer soldiers
deserting the stricken towns,
fleeing the fired vehicles.

You ride unharnessed animals
through celestial drifts.
In goosedown I wade the pasture's
floury width. There goes a comet,
tail like blown snow around my knees.
I point to it for you anyhow.

—SONYA DORMAN

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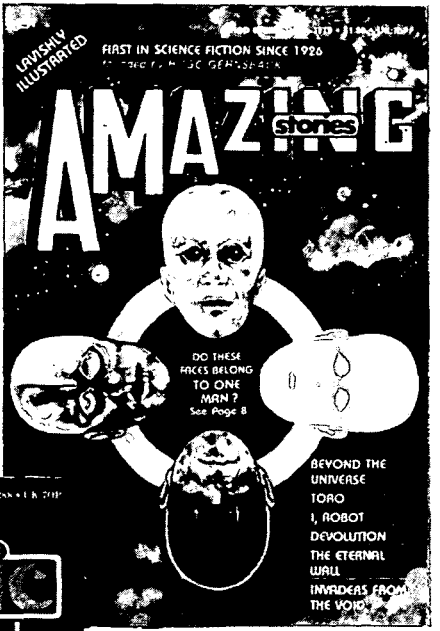

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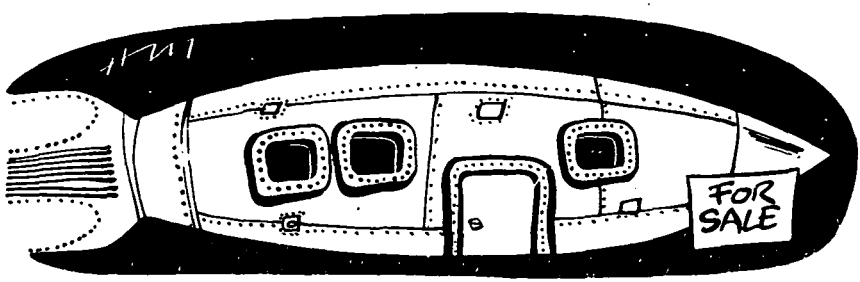

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